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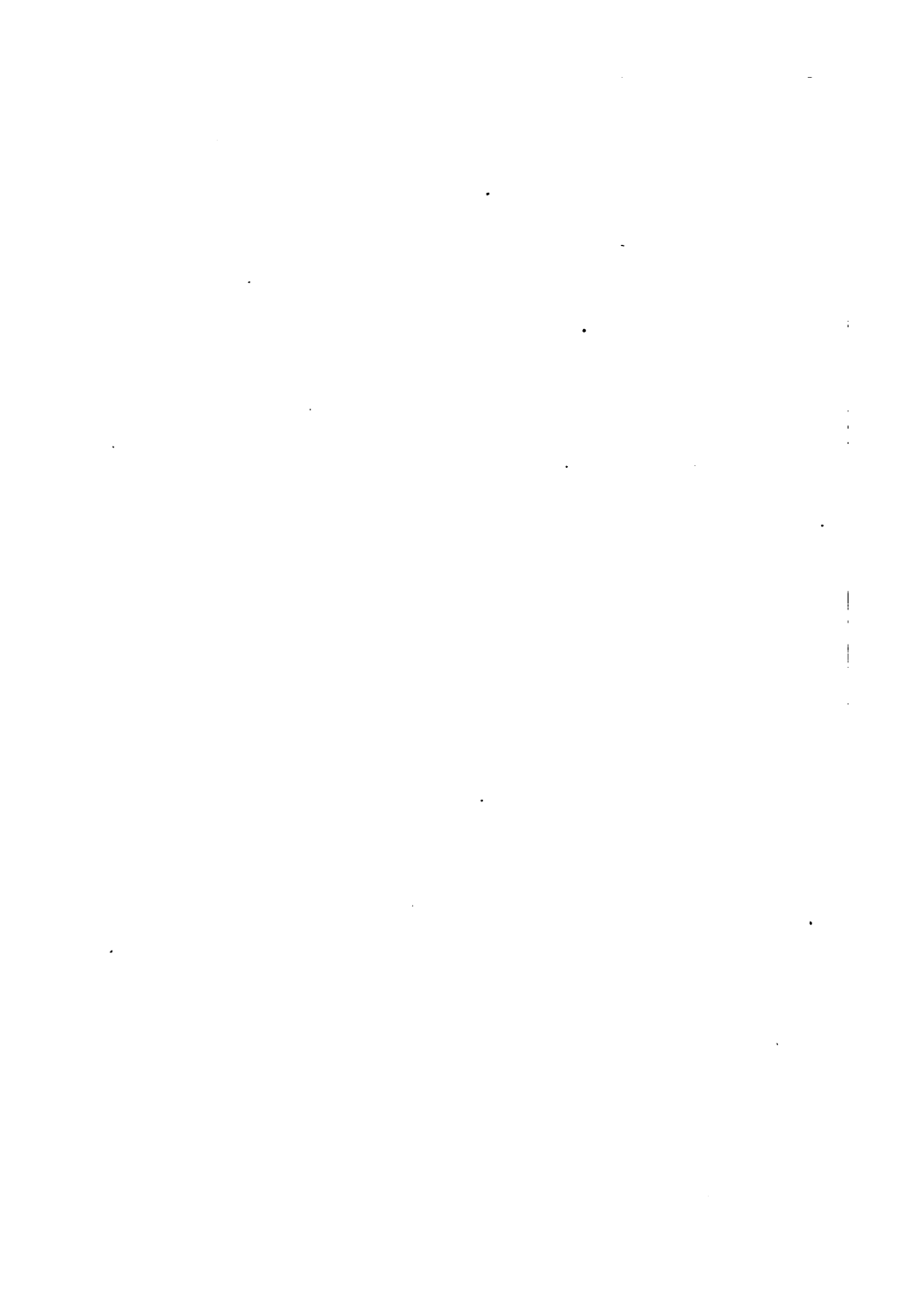
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# **CHURCH STORIES.**



# CHURCH STORIES.

*SELECTED AND REVISED*

BY

J. ERSKINE CLARKE, M.A.

VICAR OF ST. MICHAEL'S, DERBY, AUTHOR OF "CHILDREN AT CHURCH," AND EDITOR  
OF "THE PARISH MAGAZINE" AND "MONTHLY MEDLEY FOR HAPPY HOMES."



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## PREFACE.

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IN my capacity of Editor of the *Parish Magazine*, the MSS. of many stories are sent to me for perusal. Some of these, though, from their length or other cause, they are not suited for the *Parish Magazine*, yet seem likely to attract, interest, and benefit a certain class of readers.

I have therefore ventured the publication of this group of such little tales, which I have called "Church Stories," because the scenes in which their incidents are laid, and the nature of the teaching which the narratives are meant to convey, are specially familiar to Church-folk.

The scope of these Stories, however, is by no means controversial: they are simply intended to supply a meal of light and wholesome food for that appetite for books which the Church, by her schools, does more to create in her children than to cater for in their after years.

It is vain to say that people must not read fiction, for, when cottage-homes are so amply supplied with those 'penny numbers,' each of which contains a portion of some high-spiced romance, we must be content with

endeavouring to withdraw cottage readers from what is injurious in fiction to what is harmless, by offering them stories which shall be attractive in character and yet healthy in tone.

My own share in this compilation is very slight: I have merely selected the Stories which I thought suitable. I have revised some of the didactic portions which were liable to misconception; and (if I may coin a word) I have *Saxonized* and simplified the language where it seemed desirable to do so.

If the demand for this volume prove that it has been found useful for parish or school libraries, or for book-hawking purposes, it is proposed to issue similar groups of "Church Stories" from time to time, in a uniform shape.

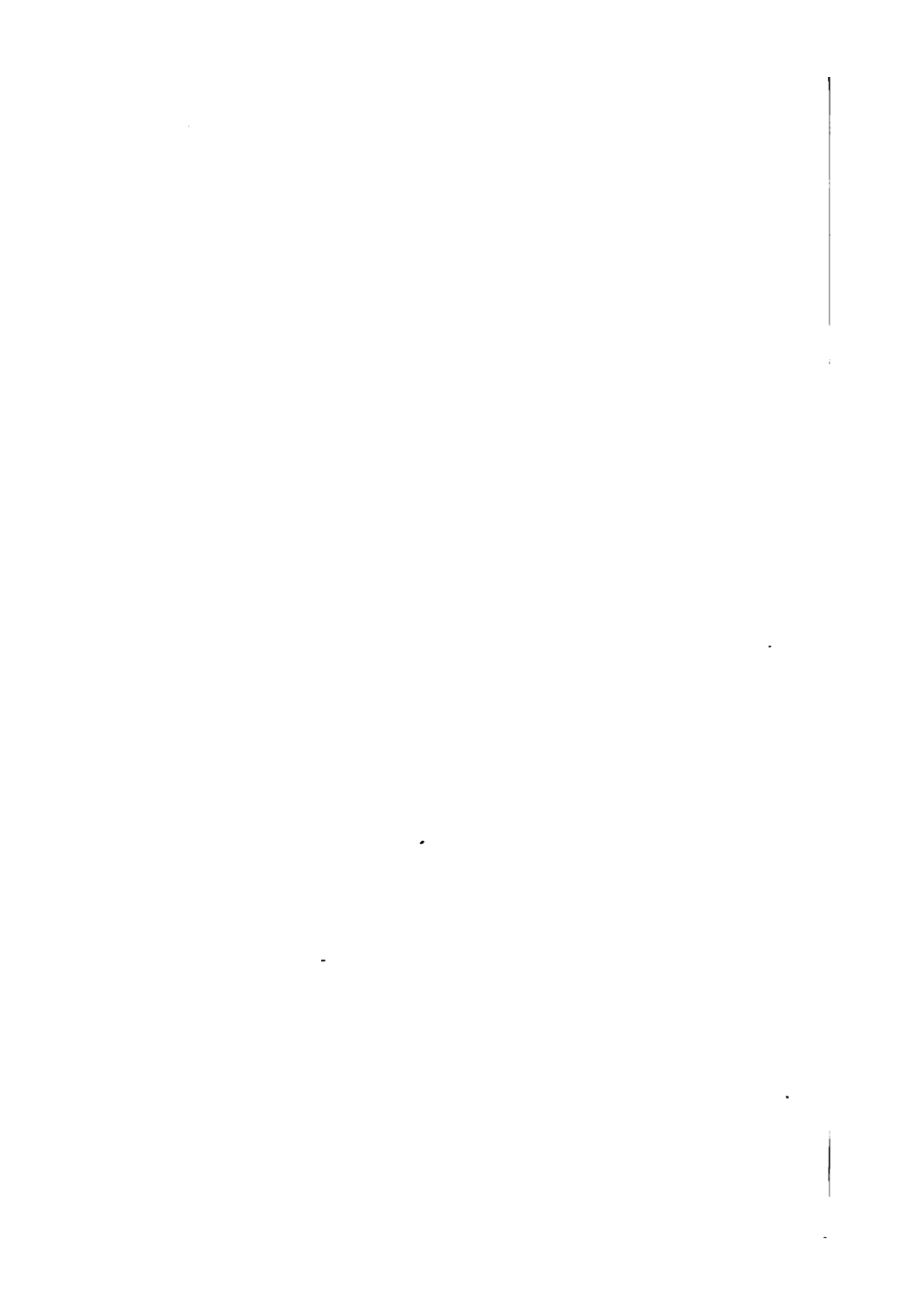
J. ERSKINE CLARKE.

*St. Michael's Vicarage, Derby,  
April, 1862.*

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# WINNIE BARTON;

OR,

## THE PASTOR OUR FRIEND.

FROM THE DIARY OF A PARISH MINISTER.

---

**I** MAKE no apology in drawing upon my diary for the following narrative, the circumstances of which will ever remain strongly impressed upon my memory, and may interest, if not benefit, my readers.

My rectorial duties began as the incumbent of a living producing a small income, but large in the amount of labour, in the oldest part of the ancient city of Norwich.

I was a stranger to the place, unknown by, and knowing none of, its inhabitants, but with the intention and desire to fulfil my high and important duties with all the attention, energy, hope, and conscientiousness which a vigorous constitution and a sincere love for my sacred calling, with a deep feeling of its responsibility, could give. In short, I was young, healthy, and ardent, and planned for myself a career of successful labour. My parishioners were chiefly poor, and to the poor I resolved to devote myself, feeling that, as they are especially the care of the Almighty, they are therefore the particular charge of His minister.

Having determined to make myself known among my flock by calls from house to house, I began these daily walks as soon as I had established myself in comfortable but inexpensive lodgings, taking as my guide the Clerk of the Parish.

John Carter, an industrious, well-meaning man, talked of "his position in the Church" with much consequence,

and, as I soon found, looked upon "Meetingers" as the black sheep who were totally unworthy of his attention as well as mine. I cannot describe the consequential and contemptuous manner with which he indicated the houses of the Dissenters, nor his surprise that I should *condescend* to call at any.

"Lork, sir! you will not go in there; they are reg'lar Meetingers; they never come to church, and, maybe, won't be commonly civil to you, sir."

"Nevertheless, Carter," I said, "they are my parish-ioners; and although they may have left the church, I must give them an opportunity of returning to it."

"Well, sir, of course you know best, and can do as you please; only I think it a pity. Mr. Best" (my predecessor) "never took any trouble about them."

"Believe me, Carter," I said, "I do not wish to interfere with the religious opinions of any who really act upon principle. I think the Dissenters mistaken and wrong, but, as many are perfectly ignorant of the tenets either of Church or Dissent, I wish to give them an opportunity of being better informed; for I feel sure that few would leave the Church if they perfectly understood what they were doing."

"Yes, that's right, sir; only I think you trouble yourself too much in calling upon such folks."

Poor John Carter! I doubted if he better understood the matter than the Dissenters, and whether he were not more influenced by habit, and his "position in the Church," than by knowledge of the subject and real principle; however, before my first day had passed, he had learnt to curb his impatience at my sometimes prolonged chat with a Meetinger.

There were many Dissenters in my parish; I called upon all with the usual success: by some I was received very discourteously, by more with careless inattention, and by a few with kindness. To all I expressed my readiness to serve them in time of need, and willingness to discuss any doubtful or difficult point in their religious opinions.

Although I determined not to be biased by the representations of my companion, I found his knowledge of my flock very useful, as giving me a clue by which I was able to adapt my conversation to each individual case.

"Why do you pass this house, Carter?" I asked, as he was walking past a greengrocer's shop.

It was a small old house with a large window, the upper part of which was glazed; the lower part was of wood, which, being let down, formed a shelf upon which was displayed a strange medley of goods. Amid ripe and really fine fruit were red herrings and eggs; in the upper portion of the window were glasses and jars of various shapes and sizes, containing sweetmeats, cakes, tops, marbles, and the many little low-priced toys in which the children of the neighbourhood were likely to delight; at the open door stood baskets of potatoes and cabbages, while within the shop I saw kites, balls of string, and other like articles.

"Why do you pass this house, Carter?" I asked.

Carter shook his head with much meaning, and replied in an undertone, "No use, sir—no use," and hurried on. "Take my advice, sir, don't call there."

By this time, owing to the quick pace at which he walked, we were some little distance from the shop, and I humoured him by not insisting upon making a call upon its inhabitants.

"Who lives there?" I inquired.

"Winnie Barton, sir."

"A single woman?"

"Aye, surely," answered Carter, with a particular movement of his head. "He'd be a bold man, I'm thinking, that would take Winnie Barton to wife."

"Why so?" I asked, amused by his manner, and having my curiosity somewhat aroused.

"Why, she is a strange woman, sir,—she is."

"A little unsettled in her mind, perhaps," I suggested; "in which case it is most needful I should call."

"No, no; *she's* not unsettled! Winnie Barton's a shrewd woman. But you see, sir, she's a little unneighbourly; she keeps herself to herself," said Carter.

"Well, I rather like women who do not gossip; it is not a very common virtue, I fear."

"That's right, sir; but Winnie is unneighbourly and rude."

"Indeed! that is a pity," I observed; "for if we are not kind to others, we cannot expect to receive kindness."



"She is not an unchristian woman, neither; but ——" and Carter hesitated.

"But an uncommon person. Is that it, Carter?"

"*Very* uncommon, sir," replied the clerk, with strong emphasis. "But, poor soul! she has had her troubles, like most folks," he continued, in a tone of pity.

"That should have softened her, if she received them rightly, that is, as sent for her good."

Carter shook his head.

"Does she live alone?"

"No, sir—there it is," said Carter, mysteriously.

"Is that her trouble?" I asked, but could not receive an answer till after I came from a house at which I called; and when again at liberty my companion seemed unwilling to renew the subject.

"We were talking of the woman Barton," I said; "and as there seems to be something mysterious or unusual about her, I wish to know a little of her history before I call upon her, which I shall do this evening or to-morrow."

Again Carter repeated, "No use, sir—no use."

"Well, I shall try; and in the meanwhile tell me something of her. You said she had had trouble; of what kind was it, or is it? Is she very poor?"

"Oh no, sir," answered Carter, in a decided tone. "Old Barton carried on the same shop for years. He was a sort of a miser, and, when he died, left some bit of money, besides the house, to his children, that is, to Winnie and Alice."

"Does her sister live with her?"

"Yes, poor creature! I don't know what she would do without Winnie."

And then, as we walked, and between my many calls at the cottages, the clerk told me the following outline of the Barton history.

He spoke plainly, with no comments of his own, unless my questions drew them forth.

Old Barton, as Carter called him, had carried on the same trade as his daughter now did for many years, having originally been a seafaring man of some kind. Carter hinted that he had not been entirely free from the smuggling business, and that it was thought he gained his first few pounds by tobacco and brandy which had paid no duty.

However that might be, when he took that shop, he was not without money, to which, by frugal habits and a good trade of its kind, he was able to add, besides buying the house.

"I suppose his family was small?"

"Yes, sir,—only two girls. Barton was twice married; Winnie is by the first wife, and Alice by the second."

The second wife died soon after the birth of her child, and thus Winifred, or Winnie, who was growing into womanhood, became, as it were, a mother to the little Alice.

"Well, sir," continued Carter, "Alice was a pretty child, and a bit spoiled by father and sister. After Barton's death, she married a gay young chap of unsettled and roving habits, but who seemed to be fond of his pretty little wife; and she, poor girl, loved him better than he deserved."

"Did he do badly?"

"Aye, sir," answered Carter, shaking his head, "badly, indeed. Just before the baby was born, sir, he took himself off without saying a word to anybody, and never came back again."

"Sad, indeed, Carter; but I suppose he let them hear from him."

"Never a word, sir, from that day to this. The sisters expected him back, but he never came; and, in my opinion," continued Carter, in a confidential manner, "he never will. There are bad men in the world, sir!"

"Indeed there are, Carter. But surely he had some friend or acquaintance who knew his movements."

"No friends, sir, but some idle acquaintances; and 'tis thought he was tempted by one to go away into foreign parts—to the diggings, maybe."

However that was, poor Alice's trouble came upon her in the first days of anxiety and sorrow; her baby died, and she became, as Carter described it, "demented." Winnie devoted herself to her poor sister, nursing and tending her with the greatest gentleness and love, while to every one else she became soured and estranged.

"Why, sir, you may believe me, she scarce lets a man enter the house, or speaks a civil word to one; and as to Alice, why no one has seen her since he went away."

"How long is it since all this happened, Carter?"

"Well, sir," replied Carter, slowly and with consideration, "it must be nigh upon five years come Michaelmas."

"Poor creature! I must see Winnie Barton to-morrow, without fail."

"Take my word for it, sir, she will never be a friend to you."

"Well," I answered, smiling to myself at my clerk's words, "I must try to teach Winnie that I am a friend to *her*."

"Won't do—won't do, sir," said Carter, shaking his head portentously; "she won't be civil to you."

"Nevertheless, I must do my duty to her, Carter."

This little history had interested me much, and I resolved to do all in my power to soften the sorrows of these two poor women, who appeared to be cast off by every one, perhaps because Winnie had first separated herself from her neighbours.

It was late that day before my round of calls was completed—too late to call upon Winnie Barton that evening; but the next morning I sallied forth early.

Winnie Barton was in her shop, engaged in arranging her stock of vegetables, with her back towards the door, when I entered, saying, "Good day, Mrs. Barton; yet I know not if I am right in addressing you thus."

"I am Winnie Barton," she said, without looking at me, or discontinuing her employment; "what do you want?"

"I call upon you as your Pastor, wishing to be acquainted with all my flock."

She turned her head, and looked at me fixedly for a moment; then, with "Humph!" went on putting potatoes into a basket.

"I believe you are a Churchwoman?" I said.

"I never go to church," she answered, shortly.

"I am sorry for it. Still you profess to belong to the Church; you do not go to Meeting?"

"I never go anywhere," she said, doggedly.

I hesitated for a moment; then, thinking it advisable not to enter into any discussion in our first interview, I said, "You appear busy this morning; I will not interrupt you, but shall hope to find you more at leisure another day. Good morning!"

"Good morning!" replied Winnie, without stopping in her work, which I fancied she did with a view to avoid conversation, rather than because it was necessary.

Such was my first interview with this singular woman—not very promising, perhaps; but I was resolved not to be rebuffed, for I really hoped in time, and by kindness, to assure Winnie I was a friend who earnestly desired to lead her to happiness here and hereafter.

This occurred on the Thursday, and the next day I desired the woman of my lodgings to send to Winnie Barton's for vegetables, saying particularly they were for me.

On the Sunday, when I was in the vestry after evening service, Carter said, "Hope you'll excuse me, sir, but have you seen Winnie Barton?"

"Yes, Carter; I called on Thursday."

Carter looked curiously at me, evidently wishing, but fearing, to ask the result of my call.

"I cannot say she received me with pleasure," I said; "but I have no doubt we shall be better acquainted after a time. She must have been a handsome woman in her youth."

"Why, yes, she wasn't bad-looking, though always a bit stately, as one may say, and nothing like her sister. Why, sir, Alice was as pretty a creature as you could wish to see—all life and gaiety, and used to be singing all day. Old Barton was mainly proud of her, and called her his Birdie. Poor thing! poor thing!"

"I hope to see even Alice one day."

"Not very likely, I am thinking, sir."

I continued to send for my vegetables to Winnie, and for anything else her shop could furnish me with, but purposely refrained from repeating my call for a week or two, during which time I was fully employed among the other members of my flock, and hoped I was gaining ground in their good opinion. I was interested in all, and discovered some singular characters among them, but none which more fully occupied my thoughts than the Bartons.

One day I was standing not far from Winnie's house, talking with one of my parishioners, when a knot of young boys, just let loose from school, gathered in front of Winnie's

tempting shelf, and I soon heard a hushed titter among them, and Winnie's voice in harsh tones bidding them "begone their ways."

The boys seemed full of fun, bordering on mischief; but, for some time, they did nothing that was to be blamed.

I watched them narrowly, even after parting with my friend, for I expected there would be something amiss.

Presently a little urchin, taking an egg in his hand, broke it over a pint of fine ripe raspberries, calling out immediately, "Winnie! Winnie! I say, your eggs are rotten! Look!" pointing to the spoiled fruit.

Poor Winnie was angered, and, darting to the door, shook her clenched hand at the culprit, exclaiming, "You young rascal! You vagabond!"

The boy, expecting to feel the force of the formidable fist, stooped down, and, running away, unexpectedly rushed against me.

I immediately seized him by the collar and shook him well.

"Naughty boy! How dare you behave so to a poor woman?"

The boy was now thoroughly frightened, and began, not to cry, for there was no appearance of moisture in his eyes, but to howl most violently.

"Oh, sir, pray don't! Sir, sir, oh, dear!"

"Come with me," I said, holding him by the collar, and dragging him into the shop, to the great astonishment of Winnie.

"Beg Mrs. Barton's pardon for what you have done."

The boy was mute.

I repeated my desire. He was still silent. I shook him again; he recommenced his howling, and at last repeated after me, in a sullen manner and tone, the apology I dictated.

During this time I had leisure to contemplate Winnie, who stood perfectly still before me, apparently amazed at my proceedings.

She was a tall, robust woman, of middle age, with much in her carriage and appearance that was unusual in her class. Her countenance wore a quiet, saddened expression, with which was now mixed some satisfaction at her cause

*WINNIE BARTON.*

being so powerfully taken up by me, and pity for the delinquent, whom, I believe, she was well inclined to pardon on the apology he so unwillingly made.

Not so, however, myself. I determined the boy should be punished in the sight of his companions, who were gathered round the window, looking on with curiosity mingled with fear.

"Now, sir," I said, putting the spoiled fruit before him, "you will eat those raspberries!"

The young urchin naturally shrank from the disgusting mixture, and looked pleadingly in my face, not daring to speak, and the tears now really chasing one another down his cheeks.

I saw Winnie was going to speak in his favour, but I was resolved upon the fulfilment of the punishment, knowing that the medley, however nauseous, would not do him any harm beyond, perhaps, a little sickness.

"You will eat it!" I said. "Mrs. Barton will, perhaps, be kind enough to lend you a spoon."

Winnie handed him one, looking at me with pity strongly marked in her beseeching eyes. I made a sign to her that I could not relent, and put the first spoonful into the boy's mouth. He would have spit it out again, but I made him swallow it; and he was now too much afraid of me not to obey implicitly.

While I did violence to my own feelings in witnessing the demolition of the slimy mess, I was amused by the various expressions of disgust displayed in the faces of the astonished youngsters outside, and interested by the gradual softening of Winnie's countenance; and her whisper of, "Poor fellow!—poor dear!"

When he had eaten half the fruit and nearly all the egg, I said, "That will do. Now, sir, you will pay Winnie for what you so wantonly spoiled."

"No, sir, please," said Winnie; "I am satisfied."

How different was her tone now to when she had first spoken to me! I was convinced there was much kindness under that hard outside shell, and hoped to bring it to the surface.

"It is very kind of you," I said, "to be satisfied; but I am not. Your goods have been spoiled, as well as eaten,

and you must be paid for them. Turn out your pockets, boy!"

The pockets were quickly turned out, and among the usual contents of a boy's bag of treasures—that is, knife, string, marbles, old buttons, &c. &c.—he found three halfpence, which he handed to Winnie.

"That is not enough, but it appears to be all he has. Now, sir, again beg pardon before I let you go."

This he did very humbly, and, upon my opening the door, went off at a quick pace, his companions crying after him, "Wasn't it good, Joe?" "Oh, how nice!" accompanied by various significant actions of the lips and tongue.

Winnie still remained standing and unemployed, apparently regarding me with wonder and curiosity.

"Three halfpence," I said, "do not pay for your goods, but you have kindly said you are satisfied; therefore I will not offer to give you more. The boy has been sufficiently punished, in the presence of his companions, to free you, I hope, for the future, from a repetition of such an annoyance. Good morning!"

And I held out my hand, which she took with more cordiality, or perhaps I should say with less coldness, than I had expected, while her eyes expressed the thanks her lips did not utter; and I left Winnie Barton, feeling that our acquaintance had now really begun.

Upon my table that day appeared, as dessert, a dish of very fine raspberries, with "Winnie Barton's respects." I cannot say that I regarded them with pleasure, or quickly tasted them: a slimy egg seemed to pervade them, and more than once I closed my eyes and turned from them. But I was gratified by the attention, and sent cordial thanks to Winnie for her gift.

Thinking I understood my woman's character in many points, I would not go near her house for some time again; in the meantime I was her constant customer, and always received choice vegetables.

After a while I again entered her shop, my heart open to meet the greetings of a friend; but Winnie was as cold as at our first interview, and, to my question if the boys had again annoyed her, she merely answered, "No."

For an instant I felt disheartened, and inclined to take

my leave of Winnie Barton for ever, hopelessly; but quickly came across my mind her troubles and sorrows, with a reminder that I was sent to bind up the broken-hearted, to be a friend to the friendless, and must work on through good report and evil report.

We continued silent, Winnie, as before, occupied in arranging her goods. Seeing her attempt to lift a large basket, heavily laden, I took hold of it to assist her; upon which she again regarded me with an inquiring, puzzled look. Whether she was unmindful of what she was about, or that I was awkward in my attempt to give assistance, I know not, but many of the potatoes fell upon the floor, and the basket was well-nigh upset.

"I meant to help you," I said, smiling, "but have been awkward. I am sorry, but let me help you to pick them up."

"No, no," exclaimed Winnie, warding me from the rolling potatoes by her arm.

I desisted, and, all being again right, said, "In my first call upon you, you told me you never go to any place of worship: is it indeed so?"

"I have not been anywhere for years," said Winnie, without ceasing from her employment of arranging her vegetables, dusting the windows and glasses, with the manner, as before, which showed her dislike to conversation. However, I was determined to persevere.

"I scarcely know if you are one of my flock. Perhaps you will tell me. Or do you go to Meeting?"

"I hate Meetings!" said Winnie, decidedly, shaking her duster with more violence than previously.

"I am sorry to hear you say so, as we are commanded to love our brethren."

"Love those that injure us?" asked Winnie, quickly, and looking fixedly at me.

"Even so. Are we not commanded to love our enemies, and bless them that curse us?"

"I can't do it," replied Winnie, in a decided tone.

"You forgave the little urchin who spoiled your goods. I saw by your looks that you did not wish him to be punished."



"That was a child's trick. But I have been injured by a man and a Meetinger, and I hate men and Meetingers."

"Then you *are* a Churchwoman?"

"Certainly. I believe Dissent to be wrong."

"But, while we shrink from what is wrong, we must pity the wrong-doer, and carefully guard our hearts from hatred."

"It is a hard matter," said the poor woman, "not to hate those who injure us."

"It is *difficult*, Winnie; and, till we forgive, it is impossible to feel for them that kindness enjoined upon the followers of our Lord."

"I can't forgive: it is impossible."

"Our Saviour forgave *His* enemies—even those who had persecuted, betrayed, and crucified Him. Has *your* enemy been greater than His?"

There was silence for many minutes; but as Winnie brought me a chair, I detected a tear in her eye, which she wiped away as she turned from me. Poor woman! I felt much for her; and although there were others of my parishioners I wished to see, she was such a singular character that I was unwilling to leave her while she seemed inclined to open to me more than she had hitherto done. Therefore I took the proffered seat, and continued our conversation.

"I cannot love him," said Winnie, for the first time naming the cause of her sorrow.

"Not love, as you use the word, but you can feel for him the Christian kindness which is required of us towards all our fellow-creatures; and the first step towards this is forgiveness."

"I can't forgive, sir: you don't know what you ask," she said, sternly.

"I do not ask you to forgive, at this moment; but I entreat of you to pray earnestly for softened feelings, to curb your anger, and accustom yourself to think of him with patience."

"Oh! it seems impossible," she said, bitterly.

"I know it to be difficult to conquer feelings that have long been indulged, but it is quite possible. You would find great assistance by attending your Church."

"Perhaps so. I used to love my Church ; but I can pray and read at home, and do so."

"I am glad of it. But you must remember that we are commanded to assemble ourselves together in God's house, where He is especially in the midst of us. You would feel the blessedness of prayer when joining in it with your brethren in Christ. I speak to you earnestly, as your friend and Pastor. You acknowledge me as such, do you not?"

"Yes, surely, sir," answered Winnie ; "and I do sometimes try to forgive when I am alone, for I know I have faults also."

"Indeed none of us are without, Winnie ; we all need forgiveness. But can we hope to receive it if we forgive not our debtors?"

"When I am by myself, it does not seem so hard ; but when I see ——" She stopped, and anger was again rising in her breast.

"I know what you would say, and can understand your feelings and trial. Still, again I bid you to think of your Saviour, how much He suffered and forgave. Will you do this, Winnie?"

"I will try," she answered ; then, looking at me from under her brow, and the colour gathering in her cheeks, she asked, in almost a whisper, "Do you know, sir—do you know our trouble?"

"I know your history in part, and, believe me, I feel for you deeply." I took her hand in both mine with the kindness I really felt for the poor suffering woman.

"And you ask me to forgive?" she said, the tears coursing each other down her cheeks.

"I do." Then, pausing for a moment, I added, earnestly, "As you hope to be forgiven!"

I said no more, but, pressing her hand, left her ; she also did not speak.

Again I abstained from going near Winnie Barton, wishing her to dwell upon my words, which I felt sure she would not forget ; and again I received from her a present of some eggs, with a message that they were fresh-laid.

The next time I passed her shop, I saw the urchin I had punished, standing with other boys at her window, and

about to purchase something. A smile almost lighted up Winnie's face when she saw me. I shook hands with her, and she answered my greeting of "Good morning" in a much more cheerful voice than I had before heard from her.

"Well, Joe," I said to the boy, who seemed inclined to run away when he saw me—"well, Joe, what are you buying this morning?"

Joe pointed to some marbles, as if too much in awe of me to utter a word.

"I dare say you can eat some fruit, can you not?"

My friendly manner not only encouraged Joe to answer a timid "Yes," but brought his companions nearer; for they had shrunk away at my appearance, and, uncertain of what was about to happen, they watched our proceedings curiously.

"Perhaps these boys can eat some also; therefore, Winnie, please give them as much as you can afford for that"—putting a shilling into her hand: "I dare say it will not make them ill."

"No, sir; I will take care of that," said Winnie, looking at me with a glad smile, which added more beauty to her countenance than I had thought it capable of possessing. Returning the smile, I went my way, leaving the boys to enjoy their fruit free from the fear evidently occasioned by my presence.

Months passed, but I found my progress with Winnie Barton proceeded very slowly. Her manner towards me was always respectful, as to her Pastor; but, although never repulsive or discourteous, as at first, she did not receive me as a friend to whom she could disburden her heart, and from whom she could receive brotherly assistance and sympathy, as well as spiritual advice. This state of mind I earnestly desired all my flock to possess, and especially those whose spirit was grief-laden, as this poor woman's was.

"Do not ask me to love him," she said, on one occasion, "for I cannot, sir."

"Love, Winnie," I replied, "is too strong a feeling to be given to every one. But I ask you to forgive, and to feel for him that Christian charity which '*thinketh no evil*;

*suffereth long, and is kind,* and which quenches hate and malice, and prompts to kind actions."

"Oh, sir, you don't know what I have suffered—and she, too, poor darling!"

"Indeed, I know you both must have suffered much—very much."

"Sir, I am twenty years older than she is. I thought my father's marriage a heavy trial; but I soon learnt to love his wife: she was as a sister to me; and when she died, poor thing! *her* child became *my* child. I doated on her, my bonnie girl—my sweet wee birdie!" She wept for a few moments; then continued, "I never liked him." She again spoke with much bitterness and anger.

"Had you no power to prevent the marriage?" I asked.

"She won me over to it by her loving ways. I could not make her unhappy; besides, I did not see anything much amiss in him then."

"And did he not love her?"

Quickly Winnie turned to me, and said, "Could he have left her, sir, if he had loved her?"

"Not if he had loved as a husband ought to love."

"*She* would never have left *him*. And it is such misery!" She wept bitterly.

"It is, my poor friend, indeed a heavy burden, but not heavier than you can bear, if you will seek for strength where alone it can be found."

"I have tried—I do try to bear it," she said, earnestly.

"But in your own strength, Winnie?"

"No, sir, not entirely. I know what you would say. But how can I go to Church? I cannot leave her."

"Cannot some friend or neighbour help you, by taking your place for an hour or two?"

Again she spoke in her quick, harsh manner, "I have no friend! and do you think I would let a neighbour come prying into our house? No, sir—no one shall see her. They knew her as the beauty of the place—my happy, gay birdie! And do you think I would let them see her now? No, sir—never!" She spoke harshly, except when uttering the few words relating to her sister: then her tone was one of gentle, pitying love.

I fully understood the poor woman's feelings, and was

going to tell her so, when a little cry came from the inner room, the door into which was partly open, as usual, that the watchful, careful sister might hear the least movement of the poor creature within; and Winnie hastened thither.

I remained in the shop, and could hear Winnie soothe and caress the sufferer as she would have done a sick and fretful infant. "Hush, my birdie, my darling!—Winnie is with you," till the wailing subsided, and sleep seemed to have come; she then returned to me.

"Winnie," I said, rising and taking her hand, "may I see her?"

She was startled by my request, and hesitated; then said, almost pleadingly, "Not to-day—not now. Oh, sir, have pity on me!"

"I do, indeed, pity you, and much wish to do all in my power to lighten your troubles. Will you believe this, Winnie?—will you consider me a friend?"

"I will try," she answered, in a sad and subdued voice; "but it is so long since I had a friend."

I pressed her hand, feeling deeply for her. Could I not understand how a mind like hers had withdrawn from intercourse with those of a more common nature? Winnie Barton was evidently superior to her class—aye, and to many far above her in education and worldly position. Her intellect was strong, and her heart warm in affection. The consciousness of possessing a little property, which to one in her class seemed wealth, had encouraged an independent spirit, which, in trial and sorrow, separated her from her acquaintances, and had thrown her upon herself. Her doating fondness for her sister was increased by the helplessness of that sister: she who had been her plaything, joy, and pride, was now more dependent upon her than even in her youth or infancy. And for all the care and love bestowed unremittingly, what was the return?—a sickly, wailing idiocy.

Poor Winnie Barton! Your sorrow was heavy, your trial was great; but had there not been greater? Earnestly did I daily pray that, through my means, comfort might come to you, and that you might be in spirit more like your Saviour and mine!

At length I obtained leave from Winnie to see her sister.

I was in the little shop, waiting while she attended to some customers, and heard from the inner room a childish lullaby sung with much sweetness, though in a manner which convinced me it was the poor idiot who was singing. Still I thought it betokened a quiet frame of mind, and therefore a good opportunity for me to see her; and I proposed doing so to Winnie, who hesitated for a few moments, then, evidently after a struggle, gave leave, saying she was fearful of the effect upon Alice, and went before me into the room. We did not enter with any special quietness; the poor young woman took no notice of us, and before her attention was aroused I had leisure to contemplate her. She was a fair young creature, sitting on a low chair beside a cradle, which she was gently rocking, while singing her sweet lullaby, and, seemingly, plying her needle upon a child's little garment. If I had not known the circumstances, I should have guessed that room to be the abode of peace and happiness; it was small, but perfectly neat and clean, with many comforts in the furnishing not often found in a house of that class. A couch stood on one side; by it was a small table, on which was a glass containing fresh, bright flowers; while Alice sat in a low easy chair, as I have said, beside a child's cradle. I know not how long we should have remained unnoticed had not Winnie said, "Alice, darling!"

Upon which the poor girl raised her head and regarded her anxious sister with a smile, though her countenance was otherwise vacant.

I, as well as Winnie, was anxious as to the effect my appearance might have upon her; but neither of us had anticipated the wild cry of delight which poor Alice uttered upon seeing me. Her work was hastily cast aside; and, before I was prepared for it, her arms were clasped round my neck, while she exclaimed, "Charlie! my own Charlie!"

Her head was laid on my shoulder. Poor Winnie was weeping much, but quietly; nor were my own eyes dry. What the next few moments would produce I dreaded to conjecture, but endeavoured to prepare myself to meet a scene of frantic emotion when she should learn her mistake. I did not move, but let her remain resting on my breast till, of her own accord, she lifted her head, and, placing her

hands on my shoulders, looked wistfully and earnestly in my face, for what seemed to me a long while; then her arms fell listlessly, she looked towards her sister, and, shaking her head, said, in a tone far more piteously sad than I can describe, "No, not my Charlie—no, no!"

Then one wild shriek rang upon our ears, when I placed my arms around her to save her from falling, for she had fainted. We laid her on the couch, and I would not have her restoration hastened too much. She was, indeed, a lovely invalid, as she lay with closed eyes, scarcely breathing, pale as a corpse, her long brown hair loosened and hanging over the pillow. I assisted Winnie with her restoratives, and watched the patient with anxiety almost equalling hers. How beautiful it was to see the loving gentleness of the poor sister-mother! The quiet tenderness with which she applied the remedies and restrained her tears, though her heart was full. Sleep came upon the sick one; and I was thankful to see the gentle breathing, as of an infant in a healthy slumber. Might not much be hoped from this? Might she not awake to perfect consciousness and reason?

"Oh, Heavenly Father," I prayed, without utterance, "let it be so if Thou seest fit!"

Long did we watch without speaking, and, when we did speak, it was in hushed tones, scarcely above a whisper. How closely was my heart now bound in human sympathy and pity to my companion in watching!

"God has been merciful to us," I said. "The disappointment was great, but the consequences have been softened to her and to us, through His loving forbearance."

"But why—oh why—are we thus tried?" cried the agonised woman.

"For your good, my poor friend. We must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God. Surely you will not question the wisdom or love of the Almighty?"

She was silent, her tears falling fast.

I laid my hand on hers, and said, "One of the uses of this trial to you is the exercise of your love and tender care towards her. You tell me you loved and cared for her when she was a helpless, tender babe, and in her early life, when she was a bright sunbeam in your home—your joy, your pride—when she could return your love with like love,

your care with joy and gaiety. But was she more dear to you then than now?"

"Oh, no, no!"

"Did she, even in her infancy, so much need your care and tenderness as now?"

"No, no, not half as much!"

"And you have loved her, nursed her, cared for her with more watchfulness now than then. This, therefore, has been *one* use of her sorrow; it has called forth to the utmost your sisterly affection. All sickness should be received as a means of exercising our affection for the sufferer, while in the sufferer herself it is intended to call forth patience and submission to our Heavenly Father."

"But she has no pain; she is so unconscious of every thing."

"Do you not think the pain in the first moment of her desertion, and in the death of her much-longed-for child, was greater than we can conceive?"

"Oh, yes, or she would not have been as she is."

"God, in His tender mercy towards her, willed that *her* trial, so great—*her* pain, so acute—should be but for a brief space, to subside into helplessness and unconsciousness; and do you imagine His tender mercy to *you* will be less, severe as your trial is?"

"It is so hard to bear," said Winnie, with renewed weeping—"and alone."

"Not alone, Winnie, if you will pray that His Spirit be with you. Hard it is; but God never tries us beyond our strength to bear. Do you remember that beautiful and sustaining text, 'My strength is made perfect in weakness?' Trust in the love of the Almighty One—submit patiently to His will. He will strengthen you to bear your sorrows, and in His own good time relieve you. Then will you have been purified by them, and be drawn nearer to Him. Winnie," I said, earnestly, "you beautifully perform your duty to your sister; will you not endeavour to fulfil as beautifully the higher duties to your God? But, beautiful as your earthly conduct is, it is still imperfect till you submit without murmuring to His will, and say even with joy, 'Thy will be done!' 'The Lord chasteneth whom He loveth, and scourgeth every son whom He receiveth!'"



"I know I am sinful, and need correction. But how did she sin?—so good, so pure."

"We know not; nor is it for us to seek why she is thus afflicted. She may have made too great an idol of the thing of this world, and have forgotten her Creator in His creature."

My eye glanced at the cradle, in which I now perceived what might have been mistaken for a child—a large doll.

Winnie followed my glance, and said, "You will not say that is wrong? It is her greatest pleasure and comfort; she nurses and fondles it; doing so quiets and soothes her."

"On no account would I deprive her of it. Winnie, will you pray with me while she sleeps?"

I offered up a prayer suited to the circumstances with heartfelt earnestness. I prayed for both—that the pain of the one might not be renewed, and that the submission of the other might be increased; also that I might be the means, through God's grace, to bring her nearer to the Cross of that Saviour whose sufferings were even greater than hers, and borne for her.

I did not doubt poor Winnie's religious belief in all essential points, but her heavy trial had not brought her to *active* religion. She was not, as many others I daily met with, who would quote Scripture, say they were great sinners, and that Christ alone could save them, yet continue day by day in their sins—abusing the best and holiest affections of our nature, and living in direct opposition to their words. In all the duties of life Winnie Barton had been exemplary, but she had fallen from the outward observances of the religion which lay deep in her heart, the active principle of which was too much crushed by the heavy sorrow under which she lay, day by day and year by year, uncheered by human sympathy, unsupported by hope.

It occasionally needed all the hopeful energy of my youth, the full exercise of my own faith, to support me in my work. Often and often had I returned home after my interviews with Winnie dispirited and unfit for all other work, and could only renew the right tenor of my mind by prayer and holy reading. But much as that heavy cloud overshadowed me, a light seemed to be behind it which must one day, and

in God's time, burst forth to cheer not only me, but also that one poor suffering sheep of Christ's fold.

As I did not think it advisable that Alice should see me again that day, I took my leave before she awoke; and with the help of a boy—the very urchin I had punished—I closed the shop, that Winnie might not be called from her nursing.

The next day she told me that Alice slept long and quietly, without movement, save an occasional faint smile, followed by a gentle sigh. When she awoke she looked at her sister, and then around the room, as if in search of some one. Winnie, thinking she wished for the doll—the sad representative of her lost baby—put it by her side; but Alice pushed it from her, saying, “No, no!” and again looked round the room in a puzzled manner. Evidently disappointed, she fixed her glance upon her sister for some time, and said, “No Charlie!” She then heaved a deep sigh, and, closing her eyes, again sunk into a quiet slumber.

That morning she awoke almost in her usual manner, ate the breakfast her sister gave her, but with less appetite than was her wont; and poor Winnie said, “I cannot but fancy there is more reason in her, sir: she is so gentle—all her little pettish, fretful ways seem gone—she lies on the couch with closed eyes, though not sleeping; and when she opens them, it is to look so piteously at me that I think my heart will break.”

“Have you given her the doll again?” I asked.

“Once, sir, when she looked so troubled, I brought it to her; but she would not notice it, and shook her head. And when she saw the cradle, she seemed so troubled that I have put both aside out of her sight.”

“Right: should she wish for them, you will be able to tell by her manner.”

“Oh, yes, sir. Will you see her to-day?”

“I think not,” I answered; then, seeing disappointment in the woman's looks, I added, “I cannot tell what effect it might have. I much wish to see her, believe me, but I should be sorry to cause a recurrence of the bitter disappointment of yesterday. We will wait awhile, till we know more of her present state, which you seem to think is an amendment upon her former.”

“Yes, sir, I cannot but fancy she is less lost.”

"I pray God it may be so! Winnie, is there no cause for thankfulness now, and will you not return thanks to Him who is guiding all things?"

"Yes, sir. I have,—indeed I have very often since yesterday; and, sir," she continued, in a respectful tone—"you will not be angry—I have thanked God for sending you to me."

"No, my good Winnie," I answered, "I cannot be angry at that for which I have so much wished. I am pleased to be made of use to you."

"Of use, sir! why, you are my only friend," she exclaimed with energy.

"I am very glad you think me so, Winnie. I do not come among my people merely as their Pastor, to preach to them or to pray with them, but also to be a comfort to them in their troubles, to rejoice with them in their joy, and to lead them to consider their Pastor as their friend; and if you can think of me thus, will it not be another blessed use of your affliction?"

She freely owned it would; and I left her much cheered, and with renewed hope for the poor lost one, for her, and for myself. I feared being too sanguine as to the future state of Alice, but could not deny myself the hope that a change for the better had been wrought, through the mercy of God, by the interview of yesterday. So fearful was I of buoying up my own hope, and of encouraging it in Winnie, that I thought it better to represent the case, without names, to a surgeon of much experience, with whom I was upon intimate terms.

Mr. Druce considered the case well, and was of opinion that the idiotcy having been caused by a severe shock upon the nervous system, it was possible that another shock might in some measure have restored the lost mind; it might be only partially, or it might be fully; or again, it might be that, if the mind returned, the effort would be too much for the system generally, and sense might come again only at the close of life. So strong had been the stress upon the nervous system, that the reaction might be greater than the constitution could bear. Qualified as this opinion was, I was rejoiced by the hope it allowed, and prayed that an interval, however short, of perfect reason might be granted

before Alice's removal hence, that *she* also might feel resignation to the will of God, and know the sisterly love which had watched over her.

Mr. Druce was of decided opinion that medical aid was necessary to the case, and was so much interested by my recital that, supposing it to be one of my poorest parishioners, he offered to undertake it free of all expense. This fully accorded with my own wishes, for I felt that the attendance of a medical man would relieve Winnie and myself of much responsibility; but, knowing Winnie's extreme dislike that any one should witness her sister's lost state, and remembering how lately I had overcome this feeling with regard to myself, I much doubted if I should gain leave to introduce the kind surgeon.

Mr. Druce thought it desirable that Alice should again see me, and if there should be no violent outbreak of emotion produced by this second interview, I was then to propose and to urge upon Winnie the necessity for having medical advice, and to state his willingness to attend.

When I called at the shop in the evening, I found Alice was already in bed; she had been in a quiet state all the day, taking hardly any nourishment, and negligent of her customary little employment and amusements, and had early signified her wish to be in bed. I told Winnie what had passed between Mr. Druce and myself, as to his attendance, the chance there was of partial recovery, and strongly urged that he might be allowed to see her. At first there was, as I had anticipated, a decided repugnance—almost a refusal; but I represented strongly the necessity for it, the assistance Mr. Druce would be to her, and that, as she had acknowledged me to be her friend, she could not suppose I would ask or recommend anything that was not for her and her sister's benefit; but that much would depend upon the manner in which Alice should bear my second visit; therefore I would say nothing more at present.

When I made my visit which was to determine so much, the poor girl was asleep;—I say *girl*, for the slight form and delicate beauty were those of girlhood; the years of her suffering seemed to have passed over her lightly, without having added the appearance of equal age. Yet, could it be called suffering? She had been free from bodily pain,

and was unconscious of her mental malady, and, save an occasional waywardness or pettishness, had been as happy as a state of imbecility could be. No, the state of suffering was not hers, but her sister's. She was dozing, and we waited some time her awakening. When she awoke and perceived me, a slight trembling passed through her frame; her brows contracted slightly, and I fancied I could trace an expression of fear in her eye.

Again came the gentle murmur of—"Not Charlie, not Charlie!" with a sigh.

I took her hand in mine, and said, "No, dear Alice, but a friend—a loving friend."

She regarded me inquiringly and with bewilderment, passing her hand across her brow; then turned her face from me to her sister, who, bending down, kissed her pale cheek fondly. After a while she again looked steadily at me; then, raising herself in the bed, she uttered a wailing shriek, and, clasping her arms round the neck of her sister, who leaned towards her, she exclaimed, in a frightened tone, "Winnie! Winnie!" and sobbed convulsively upon her sister's bosom.

"Alice, my darling! my wee birdie!" said the poor sister, soothingly, "I am here. Winnie is with her darling. None will hurt you, my pet. Every one loves Alice."

At length she was soothed; the sobbing ceased, and she lay upon her pillow, her hand tightly clasping Winnie's, and her eyes fixed upon her sister's face, till nature gave way, and they closed, I feared, from exhaustion; yet I rejoiced at her state being less excited than on the former day. As soon as possible—that is, when there was little fear of disturbing her—I placed my fingers on her wrist, and found the pulse so feeble and fluttering that I urged the calling in Mr. Druce immediately.

"You do not think she is dying?" anxiously asked Winnie.

"No, I do not think she is in immediate danger, but in a very weak and feeble state; and it will be better, indeed I must say right, that Mr. Druce should see her as soon as possible."

"Not to-night, please, sir; she will sleep now," pleaded the poor woman.

"Then to-morrow morning I may bring him?"

"Yes, if it must be so."

"You will find Mr. Druce very kind. Remember, he is not unaccustomed to such cases, and knows what you so deeply feel on her account. He may do your dear sister much good; and it is your duty to use all the means granted by God as an alleviation or cure. However her illness may terminate, it will be a satisfaction that you left no means untried for her recovery. I speak, my dear Winnie, as your friend, as you have styled me."

"Yes, sir, I know you do, and I will do as you wish."

Accordingly, the next morning Mr. Druce accompanied me. There had been no change in the quiescent state of Alice; when she had awakened during the night, she had merely called "Winnie" in a gentle, plaintive voice, and, satisfied by her sister's answer and kiss, sank again to sleep.

I dreaded the entrance of Mr. Druce, who was a stranger to both sisters, and was relieved, though still pained, by Alice's reception of him.

Mr. Druce was an old man, with a benevolent countenance, beaming with kindness and sympathy, his gray hair hanging rather long about his temple and head.

As soon as he approached the bed, Alice, with a sweet smile, exclaimed, "Father!"

"My dear child!" replied Mr. Druce, taking her hand most kindly.

"No Charlie!" said Alice; and the poor girl looked alternately at him and at her sister, with more of sense in the expression than I had ever witnessed before, and passing her hand over her forehead, she said, "I think I have been ill—have I, Winnie?"

"Yes, dear Alice, very ill, but we hope you will soon be better."

She then looked more earnestly at Mr. Druce, and became a little bewildered.

"Not father!" she said, sadly. "Oh, no, it cannot be!"

"No, dear Alice," said the kind man, "but a doctor, who will try to make you well. You will do as he bids you, will you not?"

"Yes," she said, feebly; then, after a pause, turned to her sister, and in a mournful tone asked, "Is he come back?"

Poor Winnie, with falling tears, answered, "No, dear birdie!"

Then came a low wailing, and she said plaintively, "Gone—dead!"

The caresses of her sister, and fond epithets, after a time soothed the poor girl, and, holding Mr. Druce's hand, she closed her eyes in sleep. Long and careful was the watching before the kind surgeon called me from the room to give me his opinion. Alas! how should I best communicate it to Winnie? The poor invalid might partially recover her reason, but it would be as the last bright flicker of life. Her delicate constitution, shaken by her sad distresses, could not gain sufficient strength to second the efforts of returning reason—yet she might linger some time.

Winnie had become much softened during the few last weeks; she had gradually yielded to my influence, and, frequently expressing her gratitude, had learnt to depend upon my leading her to Christ for consolation.

"I am," I said, "but the instrument of God's love. I work His will; to Him be your thanks given."

"Yes," she replied, with earnestness; "since I have known you, sir, my good Pastor and kind friend, my heart seems changed. I was in misery, and though still my unhappiness is great, my heart is soothed. I have never ceased to pray, believe me, but I thought it hard to suffer so much; now, I can trust more to the Almighty, and rest upon my Saviour's love."

"You make me very happy in hearing this; may He, indeed, send you the Comforter! Your trials have been great, but has not strength been granted you to bear them? Might not *your* health also have given way; and, if so, who could have tended your sister as you have done?"

"Oh, yes, I know I ought to be thankful, and believe me, sir, I am," she said, with humble earnestness.

"I do fully believe you, and therefore I know you will be able to bear any trial which awaits you."

"But you think her better, do you not, sir?" said the poor woman, anxiously.

"My dear Winnie," I replied, taking her hand, "nothing ought to be concealed from you. Your dear sister is *not* better." Winnie looked alarmed. "She is very feeble, and

though her mind may return in some degree, I fear it will be the prelude to her removal."

"Must I lose her?" she asked in anguish — "my wee birdie! the only thing I have to love!"

"If a prolonged life would not be happiness to her, you would not wish to keep her—would you?"

"It will be so hard to lose her!"

"It is the Lord's will; and cannot you yet say, 'Thy will be done!' Cannot you feel the loving hand of God in granting a return of reason to relieve the last hours of her life of all the distressing pain you have suffered during the last five years?"

There was a pause, during which Winnie wept bitterly.

"I am sure you will be thankful for this great mercy, when you calmly think of the past, and of the far greater misery of leaving her behind you to the care of strangers; for, remember the difference in your ages, and that you might be taken first."

"Oh, yes, that would, indeed, be misery."

"God mercifully permits you to be spared it by taking her to Himself."

"Yes, I am thankful. But will it be soon?" she asked, with sorrowing fear.

"We know not, but must patiently wait His time, who doeth all things well."

It was, indeed, a heavy trial to Winnie, and willingly would she have retained her loved nursling, who was truly the only being to whom she could give the love of her warm heart. The one object of her care and thought could not be parted from without a pang, and it needed more than Winnie's returning faith and trust to contemplate the loss without a lingering desire to be spared it. But day by day my sorrowing parishioner was strengthened; day by day she felt more and more the blessedness of her faith and trust; and though the tears would fall when conversing with me, she restrained herself when in the sick chamber; *there* self was forgotten, and every thought was given to Alice.

By my advice the shop was closed, that Winnie might devote her time and attention altogether to the invalid; and never have I witnessed more tenderness and good judg-



ment, greater patience and self-forgetfulness, than in that sick room.

It was a long illness; and only by looking back some weeks, or noting every minute circumstance, could we mark any improvement in the mind, or any failing of bodily strength. There was no suffering: so peaceful, so calm was the sweet face as it lay on the pillow, that it was a picture to gaze upon—if not with painful pleasure, with an overflowing gratitude to the Almighty.

The idea that Mr. Druce was her father, which seemed to have existed when first she saw him, passed away, but left a tender feeling which deprived her of all fear of him, and led her to receive his visits with pleasure, expressed by a momentary smile and gleam of intelligence; while to me she had also become quite reconciled.

"Who?" she asked, looking from me to her sister, one day when I entered the room with Mr. Druce, to whom she had voluntarily held out her hand, that he might, as usual, feel her pulse—"who?"

"The Parish Minister," answered Winnie.

"—and friend," I added, going to the bed-side.

The poor girl looked at me, then upwards, while her lips moved, perhaps in prayer. I seized this interval of consciousness, and used a part of the Office for the Visitation of the Sick.

There was a tear upon her cheek when she faintly murmured "Charlie!" before the fluttering mind again sank into feebleness; which call I, on my next visit, answered by mentioning him in my prayer, asking that he might seek for forgiveness through Christ, and be protected and granted life to atone for his faults. But Alice was soon unconscious of my prayer, and before it was finished the vacant expression had returned, and told that the short interval of imperfect reason had fled. The poor girl raised herself to a sitting posture, supported by pillows, and in a sweet voice sang the lullaby I had before heard, and snatches of songs mixed with incoherent sentences. It was most touching to see and hear her, especially as she sang a portion of the ballad, "Charlie is my darling!" with a smile beaming with joy and love; then, as if suddenly becoming conscious, she uttered a plaintive cry, looked

round her vacantly till her eyes rested on her sister, when she muttered, "Gone—gone!" and a fretful wailing needed Winnie's soothing; and beautiful was it to see the perfect trust with which the sick girl allowed herself to be comforted by the sad and sorrowing sister: it was as a pining, sickly infant is soothed by its loving and patient mother.

Never, from the first moment of her mind wavering, as Winnie told me, had she turned from her, although she had not mentioned her by name till the day I had heard her, and never had given her any sign that she knew her. Yet the sound of Winnie's voice always calmed her in her most agitated moments, and with her sister's arms around her she seemed relieved of all fear, and to be in perfect security.

My clerk, Carter, had frequently inquired how all was going on, and his astonishment at my account was great, and tended to raise me much in his estimation.

"Why, sir," he said, "I don't believe any one else could have done it. It is wonderful, surely!"

I bade him remember Who had strengthened me to work His will, and to Whom the glory must be given.

"Right, sir; but you be a blessing to poor Winnie Barton."

"Sent by our Heavenly Father—one of His ambassadors in Christ's name."

Mrs. Carter was a kind, motherly creature, and, as soon as I could, I associated her in the nursing with Winnie, for I much feared the unceasing exertion would be too great for her. It was with difficulty she could be persuaded to relax in her care: she could not bear to yield any portion of it to another; nor did the poor patient easily receive attendance from any one but the sister who had been her constant nurse so long.

I was obliged to represent to Winnie very strongly the need there was that she should not overtax her strength, and therefore break down; and how much kinder it was to her invalid to relax a little than to be obliged to relinquish her attendance altogether.

Weeks and months passed with little variation, till one day when, as usual, I was praying by the bed-side, Alice, to my astonishment and gladness, repeated the Lord's

Prayer with us. By a restrained movement and sob I knew poor Winnie's joy, and by her prolonged kneeling that she offered thanks to our Heavenly Father for this return of perfect reason in the invalid.

I rose from my knees before Winnie, and Alice was looking with inexpressible affection at her sister, who, upon meeting that look, threw her arms around Alice, and so remained some moments.

Winnie was now the one to weep—Alice was now the comforter.

"Don't cry," she said, gently, "dear Winnie!—I am happy!"

"Thank God!" exclaimed Winnie, at hearing these sensible words.

Alice pressed her hand lovingly upon the head of her sister, and, kissing her, said, "Thank you, dear Winnie, for all you have done for me!"

"Don't, don't!" exclaimed the sobbing Winnie.

"And you, sir," continued Alice.

I took her offered hand, and pressed it between mine.

Again she looked at Winnie, while a troubled expression passed over her countenance, and she said, hesitatingly, "Winnie, you will forgive him?"

Her sister could not speak, and the poor invalid misunderstood her silence.

"If you love me, Winnie," she said, earnestly, "say you forgive him!"

"Yes, yes," exclaimed Winnie, sobbing; "I will—I do!"

Alice smiled her thanks and love, and, after a moment, said, "And tell him I forgave him, Winnie dear! My poor, poor Charlie!" She wept, but it was without agitation. More than once she raised her left hand, and seemed to look at her wedding-ring; then, lifting her eyes upwards, and continuing so some moments, she faintly said, "Forgiveness, through Christ!"

"Yes," I said, "forgiveness to all, through our blessed Saviour!"

She then said, "God bless you, Winnie!" and, kissing her sister several times, closed her eyes, as if to sleep.

I would not leave, for I knew that life was ebbing, and

that Winnie would require my presence in the first moments of her bereavement.

Peace was in that chamber of death! Our prayers were uttered in whispers; our knowledge of her state was unspoken, but we felt that each knew it; and I uttered, at last, the Prayer for commending a departing soul to God.

Alice continued to sleep: there was no movement; gently and quietly she slept—gently and quietly she passed away. Ere morning's dawn the spirit had fled!

Piteous as it was to witness the grief of the bereaved sister, there was abundant cause for thankfulness in her submission to Him who had taken the sufferer to Himself.

After a time Winnie could make all the sad and necessary arrangements.

Knowing that the idle curiosity which collects so many around the grave at the time of burial would probably be called forth in more than usual strength in this case, and be extremely painful to the mourner,—the *only* mourner, I desired Carter to be silent as to the day of the funeral, and at the time to clear the churchyard of all intruders as much as possible. I had no fear as to the church—curiosity rests beside the grave; few, very few, alas! enter the church to join in the beautiful service which is so touching to all, so consoling to the sorrowing bereaved.

Carter did as I had requested, and the churchyard was, comparatively, empty. A species of awe was connected with Winnie in the minds of the young, and they kept aloof not unwillingly; among the elders there were a few who felt for her, and they did not approach near; by the grave stood only myself, the clerk, and his wife, with the bereaved sister, whose attention was riveted on the coffin, and on the words uttered over it.

We afterwards returned to the church, and by her special wish Winnie received the holy bread and wine for the first time since the commencement of Alice's illness. The words previously uttered, "I am the resurrection and the life," were assured to her; she lifted up her heart unto the Lord, and a soothing, holy peace came upon her long-troubled, and now mourning, spirit.

A plain stone cross marks the last resting-place of the fair flower so early taken from earth—an emblem of the faith

which points through trials and sorrows to the rest which remaineth for those who sleep in Jesus.

Winnie Barton was truly a changed woman; sorrow, which at first had strengthened all her earthly feelings, whether of good or ill, had latterly awakened her to heavenly things and drawn her nearer to her God.

Her shop was, after a time, given up. It cost her some pain to quit the house with which was associated so much happiness, equal to, if not outweighing, as I endeavoured to persuade her, the pain of which it also reminded her. But she did quit it at my request, for I found her a home in my own family, where she became the kind nurse in times of sickness, the trusty helper of my wife in the domestic affairs, and the loved friend of the children. I have given her a little Alice to love, and if a tear sometimes dims her eye, the tiny arms which cling round her neck, and the loving kiss, bring peace and happiness, and chase away the pain of memory.

To me Winnie Barton is a valued friend, a constant attendant at Daily Service and Holy Communion, as well as an able visitor among the poor of my parish; and I shall never cease to rejoice, and to thank my God that I did not listen to Carter's assurance, "It is of no use, sir!"

## NATURE'S NOBLEMAN.

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THERE was a bright light shining through the back-door of the Rectory kitchen, as it stood open on a late autumn evening, and glancing cheerily on the glistening laurel-leaves, which looked quite white where the fire-gleams caught them; and the doorway framed a very pretty picture, none the less interesting that the romance of the scene was not one of high life, commonly so called, although it was truly a high life of goodness and respectability that the persons who composed the scene were leading.

The Rector's parlour-maid was leaning against the door-post on one side, in a lilac print dress and white apron, with a tidy cap covering her smooth glossy hair, looking so bright and fresh in her trim neatness that it was no wonder that her companion was gazing at her with admiring eyes; and it was even still less a wonder that she should seem so attentive to the eager words of the young man who stood by her side. He was tall and well built in figure, and with an open, manly English face, with a beaming smile, and a look which told of some education, and also of natural refinement.

Mary Morris and Stephen Mason had been engaged to be married for three years, and it was with her master's and mistress's full consent that Stephen's visits were paid on each alternate Sunday, so that Mary enjoyed her meet-

ings with her lover without constraint or concealment : there was no need to hush the happy laughter, nor to shut the back-door, where Stephen generally found her waiting at the appointed times. To-night there could be no evening walk, as cook was out, and Mary in charge of all at home ; for Mr. and Mrs. Evans were far from rich, and could keep only two maid-servants, but, as they often said, " Two such servants as Mary would be indeed all they could desire." But Stephen and Mary seemed happy enough without their walk, and their conversation was more than usually engrossing ; for Stephen had come this night on most important business to them both.

" Well, Mary, then I shall see the master presently, and ask him to put up the banns next Sunday : that'll take three weeks, and so in about a month I may be hoping to have you really in our own little home. I can tell you it's dull work for a chap there alone, especially in the evenings ; and if I weren't thinking of somebody, I don't know how I should get through them. The last thing I did and finished up last night was a rare big cupboard for your storekeeping."

" I'm sure that will be nice, Stephen, and I'll be right glad to use it ! But, you know, I can't put my mistress out by going before she's suited with another, and perhaps that mayn't be by the month's end ; and think how kind they all have been to me. Hadn't I better speak first to her, to know when she could best spare me ?"

" It's rather hard on a poor fellow, though," said Stephen, " when you know how I've been working and slaving to get the home ready for you ; and ready it is now, and I'd be proud to show you how nice I've got it. There's many a comfort you don't think for, I know ; but I don't want you to see it till it is really all your own. And, Mary, you can't know how lonely it is ! I'm sure I've been patient enough, and never pressed for our marrying before I'd made the way straight for keeping you respectably."

" But, Stephen, I don't want to be keeping you waiting longer than to do by mistress as she has always done by me ; and it's my belief it won't be so long neither, for I think she'll take Ann Green, who has just left Sunday-school, and is looking for a place ; and if so, then, when I've put

her in the way a little, they'll be ready enough to spare me."

"Yes," sighed Stephen, "that's all very well to say; but it'll keep me, maybe, into the winter; and every day now'll make a difference. The crops are all up and thatched, and my autumn work pretty well finished, and I've hay enough for winter cow-keep; and the best chance for such a little farm as mine is to keep a dairy, and there'll be a rare good sale for butter in Drayton; and how am I ever to make that?—let alone the time for milking. There's the fair coming on, too, in a week, when I meant to buy another cow. I can't get along any longer without you, Mary, anyhow."

"Well, we'll see and hope, as we have done before," said Mary; "but if you're going to get a cow, why not buy master's pretty Alderney? He said he should give up the fields and the cows when I went."

"I'll have a look at her to-morrow," said Stephen; "but now, Mary dear, do get me to see Mr. Evans, for I know he'll hear reason, if you won't."

Mary was still debating about it's being her duty first to consult her mistress's convenience, when Mrs. Evans's voice was heard in the kitchen; and Stephen, walking up to her, made his own request before Mary had time to understand what he was about.

"If you please, ma'am, do you think you could spare Mary by the end of the month, or thereabouts? for I've got all ready for her down at the farm: and it's a matter of consequence that I shouldn't be much longer waiting, as there is a deal for her to see to; besides that, I've been pretty patient for this three years past; and Mary is so afraid you can't spare her yet awhile, that I made bold to tell you myself."

"You deserve her well, Stephen, and I shall not stand in your light, at any rate," said Mrs. Evans: "but I came to tell Mary to ask you in for your supper, and afterwards you can speak to the Rector yourself about it." And with a kind "Good night!" she left the lovers full of hope and plans for their future happy life, to which they had indeed every right to look forwards.



But there was a harder heart watching them from without than good Mrs. Evans's from within, although they did not see it—a dark figure lurking concealed amongst the laurels, and overhearing all their pleasant plans and happy talk; and as Stephen came in with Mary, and closed the door behind him, the black shadow glided silently away, and they little knew how they had been observed by evil eyes and envied by an evil mind.

Mary Morris had been an orphan almost as long as she could recollect. At the age of eight she remembered her widowed mother's pauper funeral, and the bitterness of her childhood's grief. Then she would have been taken to the workhouse, as her only refuge, but for the kindness of Farmer Jones and his wife, who, pitying the broken-hearted child, and having heartily respected her good, hard-working mother, they saved her from being thrown upon the parish, and took her to their own home, nominally to take care of the poultry, and be a little errand-girl for Mrs. Jones. With them she had lived well and happily for twelve years, filling, after a while, the place of their house-servant, until she became entirely occupied with nursing her mistress in a long and trying illness, which ended only with her death, and then Mary came as the Rector's house and parlour maid—a situation in which, for six years, she had been gaining the affection and esteem of all the family.

But it was not only the affection and esteem of her employers which Mary gained by her conscientious, duty-doing life, and by her quiet, modest conduct. Farmer Jones's carter-boy—no other than the good-looking, industrious Stephen Mason—from the time he was fifteen years old, had made up his mind that some day he would marry Mary; and with this aim in view he had made the most of every opportunity of advancing himself, had diligently attended the evening adult school, had risen step by step, had striven, and saved, and worked hard for his master and himself, till, by industry and perseverance, he had made himself almost independent, and had put together enough wits, knowledge, and money to enable him to rent a small farm of about thirty acres, and stock it sufficiently, at least, for a fair chance of success at starting. This had required, indeed,

an amount of self-denial, industry, and ingenuity which not many men possess; and Stephen had borne with many a jeer and sneer from his fellow-labourers during his many years of farm-apprenticeship for "his miserly ways and unsociable habits," as they called them; but still it had been a labour of love with him, and it was a bright hope which held him on in his steady course of honesty, sobriety, and toil.

It was the custom on Farmer Jones's land to give task-work to all the men, and few could have believed how much Stephen, with the blessings of good health, a strong frame, and a willing heart, managed to earn and save in the course of his fifteen years of labour there. To be sure, latterly he had had high and regular wages; for Mr. Jones, as he had himself advanced in years, had made him his bailiff, and he had thus gained much experience, which, with Stephen's future designs, was, as he said, "as good as money to him."

Now Mr. Jones, too, had been laid by his wife in the churchyard which they had so constantly walked through together to the church they had ever attended, and the grass was green and smooth over both their graves, round which Mary had planted many a flower in reverence and love for her kindest earthly friends.

Since then Stephen had taken a portion of the old farmer's land which had been separated from the rest, and consisted chiefly of water meadows, forming a rich pasture on each side of the river, and with an old small house upon it, in summer standing higher above the marshy land, and surrounded close by the stacks and out-buildings; but in winter it sometimes seemed almost in the middle of a lake, when the river, overflowing, came up to it at least on three sides round.

It was pretty enough just now—almost as pretty as a cottage could be, for a cottage it was, though a farm-house it was called; and by dint of training creepers all around outside, and by filling it with good substantial furniture within (chiefly the work of his own hands), Stephen flattered himself that he had made it at least fit to receive its mistress—the only thing now wanted to complete it in his eyes. As he walked home that evening, after a satisfactory

talk with the Rector, he could not help singing over again to himself, in his joy and happiness, the Psalm that had been sung in church during that afternoon's service:—

“ The man is blest who fears the Lord,  
Nor only worship pays,  
But keeps his steps confined with care  
To his appointed ways.

He shall upon the sweet returns  
Of his own labour feed,  
Without dependence live and see  
His wishes all succeed.”

And Stephen, walking home in the starlight, and with the sunshine of his own warm heart and good conscience within, thought not that he who felt so much in charity with all the world could have an enemy so near him, and one so deadly, that but for the natural cowardice of a craven heart, he might have been struck down on his homeward road, and never have seen again his comfortable house, or the Mary who was to make it home to him.

That same dark shadow which had lurked behind the laurels at the Rectory was dodging him now, along the lane and under the hedges of the fields, watching to take advantage of the shade of every bush and tree, and even over the common and across the foot-bridge of the river, into the marshy meadows of Stephen's own farm, till he came to his own door-step, where he stayed only to unlock his door and fasten it again behind him.

Still the watcher waited, till he saw Stephen's light shining through the window, which fell on his own white face, quite ghastly with the passionate thoughts of rage and malice which filled his uncontrolled and wicked mind. If Stephen had thought of looking out, he might have seen that face, which he knew but too well, scowling at him through the darkness, and meditating designs of vengeance and hate; but Stephen's thoughts were only of peace and love, as he offered up in full earnestness the words in his prayer, “Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive them that trespass against us!”

It is strange to trace the differences in the characters of

those who, in the same situations in this world, lead such opposite lives in the sight of God.

That evil-hearted man, glaring up into Stephen's window, had, when a boy, been in a like position with himself. They had worked side by side for years on the same farm, had both enjoyed the confidence of their master, and gained the best of characters for their steadiness and industry. But the one had worked in honesty and straightforwardness — the other, by crooked ways, had obtained the good opinion he had never really deserved; and Isaac Williams, with his deceit and cunning, and fawning manners, had so twisted himself into old Mr. Jones's favour, that he had fully expected to have been chosen as head man instead of Stephen; and so he probably might have been, but that his evenings had not been spent as Stephen's were, in the steady attendance at the evening school; and when Mr. Jones came to test their powers of book-keeping, he soon found which would be the most really useful to him: and so Stephen was promoted, to the fierce wrath of Isaac Williams, who had, besides, another secret ground of deep dislike to him.

For Isaac too, cold and stern as he always seemed, had been captivated by Mary's prettiness and engaging ways, although she was no vain flirt, and in her long and true attachment to Stephen had never thought of any lover but him. Still she could not help winning love from all who knew her; and though often afraid of Isaac's flattering, fawning manners, she could not avoid seeing that he endeavoured to make himself acceptable to her, and she had often been obliged to give him sharp and decided rebuffs. She had never dared to tell Stephen of the manner in which Isaac annoyed her, as she knew that there were strong natural passions under his generous and kind-hearted temper, and she feared his power of self-control in such a case; and so Stephen was not aware that he had even a would-be rival in the world.

Since the good old farmer's death, Isaac had obtained the situation of gardener at the Hall, and felt in his secret heart more than ever jealous of Stephen; for could not he also now well afford to keep Mary in all the comforts of which he had heard Stephen boast? And why should

Stephen's home be brightened by the hope of such a wife, while he must return day by day to a dreary and lonely cottage?

He had the feelings of Esau in his heart as he thought he had been supplanted these two times, and in his malice and fury he would, if he could, have slain the man who might have been to him as a brother.

That same night, or rather the following morning, about two o'clock, the inhabitants of the Rectory, and indeed of the whole village, were suddenly awakened by the deep clang of the church-bell ringing at a time and in a manner that they had never heard before—neither tolling for a death, chiming for a service, nor pealing for a wedding, but swinging out of time in hurried jerks. Every one got up in alarm, but no one guessed the cause until the cry of "Fire!" was heard in the village street. The Rector and his school-boy son were out at once to lend what help they could. Harry Evans ran on in the misty morning fog to where a knot of men, half asleep, were trying to drag out the engine belonging to the Hall. It had neither been used or looked at for many a day, not since the Hall itself had taken fire a dozen years ago. Harry eagerly asked for particulars.

"It's down at the Marsh Farm,—Stephen Mason's; and it's a wonder he wasn't burnt in his bed: all his stacks must go, but maybe we'll save the house yet, if we could but get this engine to work; but Isaac Williams, the gardener, has the key, and he isn't come up yet, so we've had to burst the door open, and now we ain't much forwarder."

It was lucky for the villagers that their Rector knew a little more about fire-engines than they did, so he quickly arranged the forces, and long before Isaac Williams could be found, the engine had reached the ruins of Stephen's happy home, and was at work upon the blackened walls, on which, three or four hours before, the roses and honeysuckle had been flowering and casting their fragrance through the casement windows.

Now it was a wild scene of confusion and destruction. The haystack and the wheat-rick were black, smouldering heaps. The old wooden outhouses seemed next to have caught fire, and were blazing furiously, and the flames were leaping from them round the roof of the cottage.

The stamping and cries of his two cart-horses in the stable had first roused Stephen from his sleep, and when he had got down and released them, and turned them, singed and scorched, to gallop in terror over the meadows, he began to perceive the greatness of the calamity which had fallen upon him.

Single-handed he saw that he could do nothing, but it did not take him long to reach the village, which was hardly a mile from the river-side, and to collect many friends and neighbours to his assistance. But by the time he had returned, the cottage was alight. The back part, being thatched, was flaring hopelessly, and till the engine came there seemed no chance for any of poor Stephen's hardly earned possessions. But with the engine and Mr. Evans there came real help and rescue, and, under the Rector's energetic directions, the active hands and willing hearts worked hard, and, thanks to them, and to the fact that the river was so near, the flames were at last got under. By the time the sunshine took the place of the fire-glare, it could be seen that the main part of the cottage, the two rooms downstairs and upstairs, were standing whole and firm, although the scorched and dripping walls did indeed look ruinous and desolate. The back-kitchen, which Stephen had so neatly fitted up for Mary's dairy, was gone, the outhouses were only a few smoking walls, the stacks were heaps of smouldering ashes, and the fine old elm-trees, which overhung the farmstead, were scorched and blackened.

At last poor Stephen had time to rest and realise his misfortunes, and the first feeling that came to him was one of gratitude, even in the midst of his affliction. He was one of those who take the sweets and leave the bitter, and do not refuse to smell the rose on account of its thorns—so even now his heart rose in gratitude, first to the Almighty, for the preservation of his own life during the danger of the night, and then in thankfulness to the kind help of his many friends. His singed and blistered hands were heartily clasping those of all around, while he vainly tried to express his sense of their exertions for him. Amongst one group of men standing together was Isaac Williams; and as Stephen approached them and held out his hand, as he had done to his other friends, he was distressed at Isaac's sudden with-

drawal; and at the scowl which hung on his face as he turned away. Then it struck him, that, during the excitement and bustle of the fire, he had seen Isaac standing by and calmly watching the fury of the flames, his hands in his pockets, and seemingly more intent on watching the work of destruction than in assisting to prevent it.

Stephen had hardly noticed him then, but now he thought what an unfriendly thing it had been, and he wondered at the hardness of a heart that could carry an old grudge of jealousy so long, and that could quietly see a neighbour's goods perishing without putting out a hand to save them.

The men were talking of the cause of the fire, about which Stephen could not give the slightest information. He knew that all was safe when he left his home at seven o'clock the evening before, and he believed that all was safe on his return three hours after. He had seen no signs of fire on passing through the farmyard.

It seemed quite a mystery, for though many suggested that it must be the work of an incendiary, Stephen could not believe it possible. It appeared that the stacks, stables, and outbuildings, must have each caught fire separately, and almost at the same time, as they were all burning together, and the amount of damage done in the short time could not be otherwise explained. And then, as no more could be done, the villagers went back to their homes and their work, full of wonder, but most truly sorry for poor Stephen in his bravely-borne misfortune.

Poor Stephen he was indeed, as he stood amidst the ruins of his home, very poor, compared to what he had been a few hours before, and yet richer than many a titled gentleman in his strong and uncomplaining patience under suffering. He had had need to say to himself many times during that night of fiery trial, "Shall we receive good at the hands of God, and shall we not receive evil?" and this thought had kept him from one repining word.

Mr. Evans had been watching and admiring his conduct throughout the fire, and, now that the others were gone, he again joined him, and said, "Stephen, you must come back with me now to the Rectory; I am afraid our poor Mary has been very anxious, and you must tell her the sad news yourself."

"Ah! Mary, sir, that's the worst of it. If I'd only myself to think of, a few more years' work might bring me round, but now, when we were so near being one at last!"

And a moisture glistened in Stephen's eye, which he turned away to hide.

"Well, you must follow me as soon as you can," said Mr. Evans, and he left Stephen to explore the ruins of his dismantled house, and see what yet remained to him.

The furniture had been greatly injured, much had been thrown out from doors and windows, and a heap of chairs and tables had crushed the pretty flower-bed in front of the cottage. The kitchen-garden was trampled down, the neat palings broken, and disorder and confusion were everywhere.

And this was the end of all those years of industry and those months and days of affectionate preparation! Stephen was almost stunned at first, as he lifted his furniture again into the house, and almost unconsciously began to attempt to arrange it again. Happily most of it was of a strong, useful nature, and would bear repairing, and then he remembered that at least his animals were safe. There were the cows grazing as usual in the meadows, and the horses, though looking rather ridiculous with their singed manes and tails, were not otherwise injured; and Stephen saw with satisfaction, that one hayrick, which had been stacked at some little distance, had escaped. "At least," said he to himself, "there is some winter food left; but how can we live and pay the rent when I have no corn to sell? and how can I get seed for next year's crops? I'm all but a ruined man, and my poor dear Mary, too, she'll be sadly cut up, I fear."

Just then his foot struck against something shining under the cinders of the rick—a small tin box—belonging to Isaac Williams.

There could be no doubt about it, for Stephen knew it well. It had been a tobacco-box of Farmer Jones', and often, too, had Stephen seen it in his old master's hands; and in the box there were still some lucifer-matches. The truth flashed at once into Stephen's mind, and for the moment he felt inclined to rush upon the villain who had done him this malicious injury. But then he thought,



"This does not prove it; he was standing here throughout the fire, the box may have dropped from his pocket, and I will not be the accuser. God knows, and vengeance is His." So Stephen took the box into the house, and placed it on the mantel-shelf, and tried to forget his suspicions.

His mind was made up that Mary should not know them and have this further trial to endure. For a trial, indeed, it is, as many know, to bear an injury as God would have us bear it, and to forgive so that we may hereafter be forgiven.

Stephen was a true Christian, a true man, and a true lover, and he resolved in his nobleness of heart to spare Mary the knowledge which added an additional sting to his own cares.

Mrs. Evans had soothed poor Mary as much as she could during the suspense of the fire, and the two young ladies and her fellow-servant had been so thoughtful for her, that Mary felt she ought not to give way. Then young Harry Evans had rushed in to call out, that "Stephen was safe," which so revived her that she could scarcely think of other loss: besides, did she not know that the fire-engine and the Rector were both at the Marsh Farm, and she had the highest confidence in the powers of both? So she set herself to her usual morning work, and tried to drive away her heavy thoughts till Stephen himself appeared. The joy of their meeting for the moment banished the recollection of their trouble, till Stephen said in a choking voice, "Mary, my dear, last night I was almost blaming you for wishing to keep me waiting even a few weeks. Now I doubt if I ought to be keeping you waiting for me, for it'll be many years, I fear, before I shall be where I was last night."

Poor Mary's sobs and tears at first stopped her answer, but at last Stephen caught the words.

"No, Stephen, it must be as you said; I'll come to you anyhow, never mind how poor, we'll work and strive together;" and Stephen, though he felt that in such a case he could not let her act without the counsel and consent of her kind master and mistress, her best and nearest friends, yet he was wondrously comforted by her loving self-devotion.

The question rested a little while, as Mr. Evans advised that Stephen should form some future plans, and see what

could be saved from the wreck of his property. So he was hard at work for at least a fortnight, and the landlord, being insured, had begun to rebuild for him the farmyard premises. Things looked rather straighter, and Stephen's face a little brighter, when the Sunday came again for his walk to the Rectory, and there Mary's smiling looks told of good news. Stephen was to go next day to the bookseller's shop in Drayton, and there he would know what Mary could not or would not tell him; but Mr. Evans said so, too, and Stephen was to see him on his way back. And there, on Monday, did Stephen truly find (what it is not often granted to us to see clearly in this world) the advantage and reward of his high and upright character.

He was so utterly taken by surprise that he could scarcely believe the good fortune that was in store for him.

Mr. Brown, the bookseller, saw him enter, and heard him say that he was sent there by Mr. Evans, but for what he did not know, perhaps Mr. Brown could tell.

"Certainly I can," said Mr. Brown, "and I only wonder you have not heard yourself. They say, 'Ill news flies apace,' and so did the news of your fire, but I suppose good news travels slowly, so that now I've the pleasure of being the first to show you this;" and then Mr. Brown pushed towards him a written paper, and counted slowly down forty pounds, in gold, silver, and copper. In the greatest astonishment Stephen read the list of his friends who had thus contributed their testimony to his worth. From Squire Wilmot at the Hall, down to his late fellow-workmen at Mr. Jones's farm, there seemed hardly a name omitted. Gentlemen and shopkeepers, tradesmen and labourers, all had combined to bear witness to the respect which all felt for him; and his face grew red with honest blushes, and his heart warmed within him in gratitude and joy.

Still he hesitated to accept so large a sum, and feared that he was depriving many even poorer than himself, till Mr. Evans put the matter in a different light before him, and assured him that he should consider it wrong to check the kind hearts that had spared him of their little, and proud and ungracious to refuse the generous gifts of those who out of their abundance could well afford it. So Stephen's hearty thankfulness was felt even more for the proof of the esti-

mation in which he was held, than for the substantial token of it, and Mary's pride in him outbalanced even the joy that she felt at the happy thought, that now at least there need be no more waiting.

The church-bells were ringing away one morning in the early part of November in a very different tone from the way they had done on the night of the fire at the Marsh Farm. And the churchyard was gay, even in that late autumn time, with the arch of dahlias and evergreens over the gateway. The laurels at the Rectory kitchen door had suffered severely, and the Rectory garden, and, indeed, those of all the adjoining cottages, had paid willing tribute to the few remaining flowers of the year. But, as they must soon be gone at any rate, perhaps it did not much matter,—at least no one seemed to think so, in their universal desire to do honour to the bride and bridegroom now coming through the porch. One of the prettiest village weddings, in one of the prettiest churches in the county, and certainly the best-looking couple that the villagers could hope to see for many a long day.

There was joy and sympathy on every face, and Mr. Evans thought he had never performed a marriage ceremony that gave him such entire satisfaction, even though they all regretted at the Rectory the loss that their useful friend Mary would be to them. It was a bright morning, and the sun shone out most cheerily to bid the bride good-speed. Mary's dress was very simple—she never imitated the finery of richer folk, excepting in the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit, and she was indeed far more like a lady, in her modest, gentle maidenhood, than any outward decorations could have made her.

Mary's life had been spent in putting on the apparel of holiness, not in adorning the frail habitation of her immortal soul. "In quietness, sobriety, and peace," she had passed her unmarried life, and now she was bent to be "a follower of holy and godly matrons," and her husband felt that he could indeed give her honour, as he beheld "her chaste conversation coupled with fear;" and he was hardly less quiet and reverent in his happiness than she was.

Neither Stephen nor Mary could look upon their marriage

as an occasion of uproarious mirth and noisy festivity, they knew and realised too fully the solemnity of the holy vows they had been making, and believing that they were united, not for this life only, they looked beyond this world, and had earnest and serious thoughts of the future they trusted they might share together. Yet they felt this must be the most blessed day of their lives, and were joyful and thankful as it became them to be.

Mr. and Mrs. Evans were giving the wedding dinner, which was all ready prepared for the party in the Rectory kitchen, and several of Stephen's relations and friends were present. Isaac Williams had been asked by Mr. Evans amongst the number, although both Stephen and Mary, for different and secret reasons, would have preferred his absence; but they need not have feared his coming, as he ungraciously told the Rector he "couldn't afford to give up a day of his work for merrymaking. Money didn't drop into his lap as it did into other people's." So there were none but friends amongst the pleasant party, and they were as cheerful and happy as the occasion required. The simple speeches told of love and good-will, and were more eloquent in their sincerity and kindly feeling than many a finely turned oration. And there seemed not a cloud over the future of those who had long since learnt to be satisfied with that "state of life unto which it had pleased God to call them." No doubt, even on that happy day, they could, if they had been so minded, have found many things to wish for, many people they might have envied; but they possessed that truest of all sources of happiness, quiet and contented minds, and they knew that though there were (by God's ordinance) many above them in the ranks and riches of this world, they had as good a hope of a place in the many mansions prepared in heaven for those who prove themselves faithful in the little committed to their charge on earth; and they both showed the true nobility of Christians in their love to all their neighbours, and their heartfelt gratitude to God.

It was not so pretty a home as he had hoped, which Stephen and his wife entered that evening. All that he had done to repair the recent damages had only succeeded in making it habitable again. It still looked terribly black,

and bare, and dreary outside, although the rooms inside were weather-tight and comfortable, and not much the worse for their rough usage by fire and water. The new buildings now going on made all seem still more untidy; but so far the fire had been a boon to Stephen, in obtaining for him a more convenient homestead; and he promised Mary that the garden should be as neat and trim as ever by the coming spring. So the sunshine within soon drove away all remembrance of the desolation outside, and one pleasant surprise awaited them: in the cow-stall, lying down as contentedly as if at home, was Mr. Evans's favourite Alderney cow — the very one which Mary had, before their disaster, counselled Stephen to buy. Mr. Evans had told them, as they parted, that he had sent his wedding-gift to the farm; but they had little expected to find anything so useful and valuable to them as this. Mary longed to go back at once and express her gratitude to her kind friends, and resolved that to-morrow, at least, she would do so; and, made even happier than they were before by this additional proof of the good-will shown them by those whose good opinion they most truly valued, they settled themselves in peace and comfort in the long-looked-for and hardly-earned home, where they trusted, by God's blessing, "so to live together, that in the world to come they might have everlasting life."

Not many weeks after Stephen and Mary had been settled at the Marsh Farm, the aspect of their home was suddenly changed, and they found themselves shut in on three sides by vast sheets of water; the green meadows had vanished, the trees were half hidden in the water, the river was lost in the universal flood, and its course could be traced only by foam-flecks and the additional swiftness of the muddy waters.

For days it had been raining heavily, and almost every acre of Stephen's pasture was deluged with wet, till at last the river banks gave way, and, as often happened in the winter there, the whole of the valley became a vast sheet of water. The cattle were all driven up into the farmyard, and Stephen thought himself fortunate that none had been swept away by the sudden rising of the floods.

Stephen shook his head as he began to cut his single

haystack, and anxiously calculated how long the fodder would last; but he hoped and trusted that the waters might soon abate, and looked forward also to the certainty that at least next year he should reap the benefit. He was better off, too, than some of his neighbours, for the farmer on the land adjoining him had been compelled to leave his house many feet deep in the muddy waters, while Stephen's stood with the road still open. Only, if Mary's health should suffer from this universal damp?—that was Stephen's great dread, and he almost blamed and reproached himself for bringing her to such a place. Still she sang merrily over her work, and looked so bright and rosy as she came out in her pattens, with her milking-pail over her arm, that Stephen forgot his fears in the love and admiration with which he looked on her.

For several days there was little change in the gloomy scene, but at last the clouds broke, and a bright frosty morning shone out to cheer the landscape. The trees seemed to grow daily taller as the water sank away from them; little hills came up like green islands in the middle of a lake; and at the week's end the foot-bridge was once more visible, and Mary promised herself that she should soon be able to go to Drayton again by the short footpath.

They were sitting over their fire one chilly evening; Mary had cleared away the tea-things, and taken out her work, and Stephen was reading to her a book which he had brought from the Parish Lending Library, called "Self-Help." They were both most deeply interested in a subject which so closely came home to them; and Stephen, stirred by the noble examples it described, longed still further to improve himself, while Mary secretly thought all the time that each instance of energy and courageous self-reliance was "just like her Stephen."

So that they heeded not the cold and darkness outside, while there was such warmth and light within, till a strange scream suddenly startled them. Mary's work fell out of her hands, and Stephen's book was hastily closed, as he started up with the instinct that there were others besides himself to help. When the door was opened, they heard the sound of half-choked shrieks, and of splashing. Stephen in a moment guessed the cause and the nature of the danger: some

one must have tried the pathway, and missed his footing along the narrow road.

It was the work of an instant to light his lantern and to seize his strongest cart-rope; and, telling Mary to keep the fire up and get warm blankets ready, he was gone almost before another cry could reach them. As he rushed into the blackness of the night, his light must have seemed a star of hope to the poor wretch struggling in the rushing, roaring waters, which were fast overcoming the strength with which he had hitherto battled against them.

It was worse danger even than Stephen had imagined, for it was not until he reached the bank of the river that he found himself close to the drowning man. The foot-bridge itself, rotted by the water that had so long covered it, had broken, and the centre of it gave Stephen most insecure footing as he tried to reach the human being struggling in the current, and hardly sustaining himself by grasping a plank of the bridge. As Stephen raised his lantern, that he might see to tie the end of his rope to the strongest remaining portion of the broken bridge, the light fell upon the face that was scarcely above the level of the water, and in a moment Stephen recognised his enemy, Isaac Williams. This discovery, however, did not make him hesitate a second in his leap into the cold flood, and with no less hearty goodwill did he grasp the sinking body, or fasten less securely around it the rope with which he hoped to save him. Stephen knew that he had no chance of swimming against such a current, encumbered with such a burden; and so he saved his strength to regain the broken half of the bridge, from which he drew out the now unconscious form. But the hardest part of the task yet remained: Isaac was no light weight, and, strong and active as Stephen was, it was no easy matter to carry him over the slippery footway, where a false step would have plunged them both again into the water. But his brave heart and strong arm bore them safely across the Marsh, and Mary's bright fire-light guided him to his own threshold, where he laid before the hearth his dripping load, scarcely remembering, in the joy of his success, that he had saved the life of the only man who hated him.

Although Isaac was insensible by the time that Stephen

had reached the house with him, he had been far from unconscious of his fearful peril as he struggled against the raging stream and clung to the frail plank which threatened every moment to give way in his grasp. He had endured several minutes of agony and suspense, which had seemed hours in his terrible situation. In that mysterious photography of the conscience which occurs at such a period, he had had time enough to remember the faults of his childhood, the sins of his youth, the vices of his manhood, and the crimes of his riper years. One by one all his wickednesses came before him, and he saw how he had been lured on by little and little. That hard heart was melting beneath the horror of despair, and he felt that death would indeed be welcome, if by it he could purchase pardon. The Sunday-school teaching of his boyhood, that he had shared with Stephen—but, alas, so differently applied!—had taught him to know through Whose death alone pardon can be obtained; and it had not been from want of knowledge that he had fallen into the iniquities which he now saw in their true light. His hopeless cries arose more from the agony of his distracted mind than from the dread of his bodily danger; and in answer to them there appeared to him, as it seemed, the apparition of Stephen, to reproach him for the evil he had brought upon him. Then all sense and recollection faded, and repentance and reparation seemed past for ever.

That same morning Isaac had added a fresh crime to those which now burdened his awakening conscience: he had borne false witness, and perjured his soul, to avert suspicion from his own guilty head. The temptation came upon him in this manner:—For several weeks after the fire he had not missed his match-box, or known that there was such an evidence against him. He had put aside the coat that he had worn that night, out of the pocket of which it had fallen, and had not thought more about it; no dread of detection, therefore, had crossed his mind, and he made sure that his sin would not find him out: in fact, his only regret was that his evil work had not been more complete, and he fretted in bitter malice at the help and kindness of others which had so far repaired the mischief he had done to his neighbour.



After Stephen's marriage, these thoughts so occupied him that his heart was like the restless sea; and he could not help haunting the scene of his rival's happiness, and perhaps concocting further plans for his injury. Night after night, when all seemed safe and quiet round the farm, Isaac was prowling about the house like an evil spirit; and it was on one of these occasions, as he was standing hidden in the thick darkness outside, peering through the half-curtained window at the cheerful sight within (which filled him more and more with envious anger), that he saw Mary take from the mantelshelf the tin box he had not yet missed, and use a match from it to light her fire. She had found it there, and, supposing it to be Stephen's, she had daily used it, quite unconscious of its history and former ownership; but Isaac was startled almost to frenzy at the sight: he felt persuaded that it was his box, and yet it was possible that there might be another like it. So he lost little time in hurrying home to assure himself that his own was safe: but no!—he searched his coat-pocket, but it was gone! Then he felt, indeed, that it might become a convicting evidence against him; for though he could not be positive that Stephen knew it to be his property, yet he was sure that many others did, and he determined that he must run any risk to recover possession of it, and he brooded over in his mind many schemes to effect his purpose.

In that week the floods arose and stopped his plans, at least for the present. The way by the road was too public for him to dare to use it, as he was too cautious to hazard any observation of his doings. Meantime his mind was so unsettled that he was but ill performing the duties of his situation, and had incurred the displeasure of his master, Mr. Wilmot, for several instances of carelessness and neglect. Amongst other things, some tools, for which Isaac was responsible, were mislaid or lost; and various petty thefts had been committed in the garden, owing to his leaving the walled garden door unlocked, contrary to orders. Isaac himself was too wise in the wisdom of this world, and too crafty in his wickedness, ever to risk his character by such paltry pieces of dishonesty, although he did not hesitate at deeper acts of villany; but he was

haunted by the idea that his master suspected him, and, fearing that such an accusation might be connected with the crime the detection of which he dreaded, he determined to discover the real thief, and clear his own reputation from the charge: so he and the under-gardener watched nightly, hidden in the shrubbery which enclosed the gardens of the Hall; and it was not long before they succeeded in catching one of a gang of gipsies who had taken up their quarters in a lane at the back of the pleasure-grounds. Isaac's heart glowed once more with cruel satisfaction as he and his assistant dragged up the poor trembling wretch, with his hands full of cabbages and cauliflowers, into his master's justice-room.

Mr. Wilmot was himself a magistrate, and neither a hard nor unjust one. The offence was, indeed, most clearly proved, and, had it been committed against any one but himself, he would have felt himself compelled to punish it; but as he looked at the shivering, half-famished fellow, suffering from the pangs of starvation as well as the terrors of justice, he thought he had been punished enough already by his fears, and he was disposed to discharge him with a reprimand and warning, and an order to leave the neighbourhood at once.

Isaac's anger was much excited as he listened to Mr. Wilmot's lenient lecture to the prisoner, and he was greatly vexed that he was to be baulked of the vengeance he had hoped for against the poor creature who had caused him to be falsely suspected. A suggestion from the father of lies rose to his lips—an idea that he might at once revenge himself for an injury unintentionally committed against him, and also avert suspicions which might fall upon himself on to the head of his comparatively innocent victim.

"If you please, sir," said Isaac, "though you may be so kind as to forgive this rascal for stealing pounds' worth of your vegetables, I don't think he ought to get off quite so easy; for now I come to see his face by daylight, I know he was the fellow I saw skulking about Stephen Mason's place the night of his fire; and he and his lot were camping down near the Marsh Farm all that week, as Will Parrott there can tell you. Don't you recollect, Will, you and me

passed these tramps several times, as we went for the bog-earth for the rhododendrons?"

"Yes," said Will Parrott, "I must say I do remember this one in particular, because he begged, and was saucy, and said 'twas all very well for us, who had work regular, and was cared for by our masters, but no one cared for them; and if the rich folks wouldn't give them nothing by fair means, they must find a way to make them; and he said, too, now the weather was getting so cold, they must want a fire to warm them."

"Then," said Mr. Wilmot, "if you mean seriously to charge this man with firing Stephen Mason's stacks, I must commit him; but I hardly think I can do that without further evidence, although there may be some grounds for suspicion against him."

"Well, sir," said Isaac, "I heard in the village, about the time of the fire, that Stephen had complained of these chaps lying about so in his barns and places; and he bought some locks up at the smith's, because he said he could not keep them out by words, and he didn't like to set the police after them."

"Then he must be kept in custody till I have Mason up, to see if he can identify him," said Mr. Wilmot; "so let Mason know he must be here by this time to-morrow."

The tramp was, therefore, taken off to the station-house, while Mr. Wilmot went to his luncheon, and Isaac and Will Parrott went to their work. Then Isaac began to consider what he had done, and how he might, perhaps, by stirring up the subject of the fire, have put himself into the very danger he had thought in his craftiness to have escaped, by bearing false witness against his neighbour. He began, as he thought the matter over, to fear that he had overreached himself, and to argue in his mind the best way out of his difficulty. If Stephen should recognise this poor gipsy, which he would very possibly do, as his camp had been pitched for many weeks in different parts of the adjoining lanes, and could declare him to be one of those who had annoyed him by hanging about his farm watching for any little thing they could pick up; if Stephen should, though reluctantly, be compelled to bear this testimony against him, Isaac knew that the case must undergo more full investigation, and he

feared then lest that evidence against himself, that box which he knew to be in Stephen's house, might be produced to tell its silent tale of truth, and fix the crime upon himself. Isaac did not care, and scarcely thought of the punishment he hoped to make the poor vagrant suffer in his stead. He only said to himself, "Anyhow, it wouldn't be taking his life, the worst would be transportation, and that, for a fellow like him, wouldn't much matter; but, for me, I'd die sooner. 'T would be all safe if only I could get back that box. I'll try again to-night. The cottage locks can't be very hard to force; or, if they are, I must get in at the window; and I think I see how the bolts and bars go pretty plain; at any rate, I'll have another look at them to-night, for to-morrow may be too late. If I don't get at it, or if things do look threatening, I must cut and run at once, and I don't care now much if I do, for there's nothing and nobody I care to stay for. That fellow, Stephen, has all I ever wanted;" and inward curses ended his meditations, mingled with bitter regrets that he had failed in accomplishing his purpose of revenge.

It was on that night that Isaac had started off across the footpath to fulfil his intended designs, and on that night that his evil life was saved by his generous enemy, and space was granted to him for repentance and amendment.

All his past conduct passed before him in its true colours, as he gradually came to himself, lying before the warmth of Stephen's fire, and felt kindly hands rubbing his chilled limbs, while Mary was tending him as she might have done a brother. He could not bear to open his eyes to the sight of all the kindness he was receiving from those from whom he might have looked for nothing but ill-will. So he lay still, and listened to their almost whispered words of hope and fear for him. He was indeed touched to the heart, and softened as he had never felt before. How was it possible that they should have such care for him who had cherished such savage feelings towards them? This was beyond Isaac's comprehension. He had never tried to love his neighbour, had never felt the blessings of helping others, and he could not understand that Stephen and Mary looked for and obtained reward sufficient in doing good to him who

hated them, in the satisfaction of their own loving, generous hearts, and the approval of their consciences.

Stephen got up to fetch fresh wood for the fire, and as he left the door a heavy sigh and groan escaped from the depths of Isaac's overburdened heart. Mary looked eagerly at him, at this sign of returning animation, whilst he turned uneasily on his side, and opened his eyes. Then he caught sight again, on the mantelshelf, of that glistening tin box which had haunted his waking thoughts and disturbed his dreams. "It's mine! I did it!" burst from his lips, in a tone which frightened Mary, as she thought his mind must have given way in delirium. "It's mine! I did it!" greeted Stephen as he returned from the wood-shed, and he saw Isaac's finger pointing eagerly to the box, which he was too feeble to reach. Stephen understood at once the meaning of that conscience-cry.

"Yes, Williams, I know; I guessed it long ago; but now you must be quiet and get well. May God forgive you as freely as He has helped me to do, and give you grace to be sorry for it! He has given you time, you see, to change your ways; for I doubted if you would have come round, I must say."

"What, Stephen," said Mary, "what do you mean? what did you guess? what has Isaac done?"

"I lighted up the fire here with that box," gasped out Isaac, before Stephen had time to reply. "I hated him for getting you, for getting my place at old Jones's; I hated him for years, and I could almost hate him for saving my life, which I'd as soon get rid of; but maybe I might do better."

And then he fainted away again from the exertion and excitement.

The morning light came with restoring rays of hope for Isaac's body and soul, although he could hardly believe Stephen's repeated assurances of his entire forgiveness, or understand that he did not intend to give him up to the punishment he deserved; and he could scarcely dare to lay hold on the hope of the promises of heavenly pardon, of which Stephen as earnestly assured him.

He was so weak and faint, and his intellects so shaken, that it was some time before he could explain and confess to

Stephen the extent of his recent crimes, and it was in the middle of his confused account of his false accusation of the poor gipsy that the policeman arrived to summon Stephen to Mr. Wilmot's. They had fortunately succeeded before this in getting Isaac into an upstairs room, and so Stephen managed to leave him quietly to Mary's care, promising to return with Mr. Evans, whom Isaac now was longing to see.

Stephen thought it a most happy circumstance that he was not able to recognise in the captured gipsy one of those who had lurked about his premises at the time of harvest, and it was to the mutual satisfaction of all parties that Mr. Wilmot dismissed the poor fellow with a reprimand, and heard from Stephen of his gardener's accident without surprise or further questions.

"I don't think, sir," said Stephen, "that Williams will be fit to go to his work yet awhile. He was as near drowned as could be, and seems in a bad way yet, but we'll do the best we can for him till he can be moved to his own home."

"It's very kind of you," said Mr. Wilmot, "and I hope he'll pay you properly, as he ought; he has good wages, and is in a club, I know."

"It's not for money, sir, that I do it," said Stephen, as he took his leave; and, indeed, it was a labour of charity which no money could repay.

Many days passed before Isaac could help himself in any way, and these good Samaritans tended and comforted him, pouring in the oil and wine of love and sympathy, whilst, by their effectual fervent prayers and unpretending examples, they nourished the good seed of penitence and amendment which their Christian forbearance had first sown in his heart.

Mr. Evans heard from his own lips the whole story of their goodness and his sin, and the heartiness of his confession, coming from one generally so reserved, seemed to promise a continuance of the contrition he now felt, till it should expand into "the godly sorrow that worketh repentance unto salvation, not to be repented of." But it was to Mary that Isaac would talk most freely of his newly found religious feelings, and it was to her that he chiefly turned

for consolation and encouragement. His former feelings for her had given place to a reverence and esteem so deep, that her simple sayings seemed like words of life to him.

But it must not be supposed that such a change as this was wrought at once in a character hitherto so reckless and unprincipled. It was weeks before Isaac could be moved in safety from his bed, and during those weeks these kind friends kept him in their own house, grudging neither time nor labour in his behalf. At last he returned to his home and his usual work, and Christmas Day saw him in church again, where Mr. Evans returned thanks in his name "for all the mercies that had been vouchsafed to him."

Isaac had all along kept up his character for respectability and morality, and had seldom been absent from his place in church; but he had never gone there before with such feelings as at present; and Stephen and Mary, who sat beside him, saw with joy the tears of holy sorrow which fell from his eyes. But it was not for long that he was able to join them in the assembling of themselves together, which he now so truly valued, for he had never entirely rallied from the shock to body and mind which he had sustained. During the winter frosts inflammation of the lungs came on, and rapid consumption laid hold on him; and when the spring returned he was sinking surely, without murmur or repining, for the pleasures and hopes of this life were gone for him, and he dared now to put his trust in other merits than his own. Nothing could save him here, but he prayed and believed earnestly that He, of Whose body and blood he had recently partaken with Stephen and Mary, might save him everlastingly.

One March evening, Stephen and Mary were called for to come to him, and they arrived in time to soothe his last moments and hear his parting words, "God bless you, Stephen, for all you have done for me! no man could owe another more than I owe you; but you have Mary; she will reward you. The last trouble I shall give you now is to take my savings to your landlord, or the office where he was insured. It is not much, but it will show what I had hoped to do if God had spared me longer for the task, but He has been more gracious to me. Mary, will you read to me?"

Mary opened the Bible and read softly on for some time

till she came to the words, "He that converteth a sinner from the error of his ways shall save a soul from death, and shall hide a multitude of sins."

A deep breath made her look up, and then she saw that the soul of this converted sinner had escaped in that sigh, to the city "where there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain, for the former things are passed away." The dead hand, tight locked in Stephen's grasp, was a token of the entire reconciliation between them.

These village incidents will long be remembered in Drayton and the neighbouring parishes, and there are many people there who tell their children this tale of fire and flood, as a warning against the vices of envy and revenge, and as an example of Christian forgiveness and true nobility of mind.



# HOW BEN CLIFFE CHANGED HIS MIND.

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## CHAPTER I.

"**M**OTHER, there'll be a row to-night about those Irish haymakers. Farmer Wright thought to be short of hands, as he was last wet season, and he engaged a lot of them, a while since, to get in the hay off the Upper Church Meadow; and now there are plenty of Howbury folk ready for fresh work. They're forestalled, and very angry they are about it down at the Wheatsheaf, where I was just now with father and Henry."

So spoke Stephen Cliffe—a stout, pleasant-faced young man—as he leant in at the door of his grandfather's cottage, in the village-street of Howbury, one Midsummer evening.

Old Joe Cliffe sat outside in his garden—for the cottages of Howbury stood back from the road; the wife of his son Ben, Stephen's mother, was getting the tea; and Stephen's sister Jane was stitching in the window.

"You don't say so, Stephen?" answered his mother; "I wish they would go home by the back lane, then, and let us be quiet: we're a deal too near the public, if that comes."

"Go!" said Jane—"where are they going to?"

"Down to the stackyard by Marsham Wood; they sleep in the old barns that Wright has there. And none of the back lane for them neither," added Stephen, after a moment, "for here they come!"

The women went to look out. The two rows of houses and gardens which, with a wide road and grass bordering between them, made the main street of Howbury, crept down the slope of a steepish hill; high up, in their broken line, stood the village church, and at the lower end of it the public-house that had been spoken of, with its watering-trough and sign-board, and an open green.

The sun was setting, and in its red glow there appeared over the brow of the hill, at the top of the street, a group of about a dozen strange-looking figures, un-English in shape, and step, and face—aye, even in the very hang of the rags that covered them.

Old Joe raised his head silently, and never took his eyes off them as they neared into sight, while Stephen, at the door-post, turned lazily over from one elbow to the other, so as to bring his face to bear on them comfortably.

"Dear-a-me, Stephen!" said his mother, behind him, "did you say your father was down there yonder? He is keen set against these Irishers, if ever one was."

"There's a good bit more than *one* against them to-night, or two either;" and Stephen nodded his head knowingly—the strange labourers walking down towards them the while.

"And if father don't fancy them, Stephen," said Jane, "I am sure Henry don't; for when you were away, Parson Mills wanted us to take in the poor man as he kept out of the last lot, only Henry said he would not sleep in the same room with an Irishman."

"What man was that?" her brother asked.

"'Laurence Daly,' they call him; he came over for the corn harvest last year, and works sometimes in Mr. Mills's garden, and does odd jobs for him about."

"A cowed-looking chap, with a small dark face—wears an old grey tail-coat that's too long for him," their mother put in.

"Oh! then I know him," said Stephen, thus enlightened. "More by token, when father, and Henry, and I were coming back last Sunday night from Marsham Church, he was sitting on a narrow stile, with his back to us; Henry took it at a spring, as if he did not see him, and gave the man a shove, so that he fell awkwardly off it."

"And what did the man do then?" said Jane, with an interested look.

"I expected he'd have spoken up gruff, at the least; but he just righted himself against the stile, and looked patient-like—only a bit surprised; so that I was half sorry Henry had done it."

"I'd have been whole sorry," said the girl—"that I would; for when I went up once to the Rectory with a basket of clean clothes—some of them Mrs. Mills's muslins that mother had got up ever so nice—that big black dog of Master George's began to jump about me with dirty paws, and I could not keep him off because I had hold of the basket; so I was all in a tremble for fear he should mess and spoil them, till I heard a whistle to call him, and off he went, and there was this Laurence sitting eating a crust by the spring; and when I thanked him for whistling the dog off, there came such a kind smile on his face that I haven't liked to hear folks jeer him since."

While Jane was speaking, the party of Irish haymakers passed the cottage from which the Clifles were watching them, and as they did so, a face looked out from the alehouse below, and then drew in.

"They aren't forgetting the Irishmen in the Wheatsheaf, not by no means!" Stephen said.

"They'll never think for to step in there, any of them," said Jane, anxiously.

But as they looked on, two or three of the Irish detached themselves from the rest of their party, who made a halt in the road, and, passing the watering-trough and the post from which swung the sign, they disappeared beneath the porch that Stephen held to be so unfriendly to them.

A few minutes went by, and then out they came again, hustled and hustling. Some loud shouts broke the quiet of the evening; there was a stirring amongst their countrymen left in the road, several of whom held awkward-looking sticks, and soon a general fight ensued. It was plain to the spectators that some rough insults or assaults on the part of the jealous Howbury men in the tap-room had been too much for the spirits of the poor starved but wiry fellows whom they looked on with such ill-will.

By the side of Joe Cliffe's garden ran a narrow path,

which led to old Molly Woodcock's, who baked the Sunday pies for her neighbours, and had a little board over her window, with "Bread sold here" painted upon it. In the worst of the fray below, the young Cliffes, who were out of it, saw Laurence Daly, the man they had been talking of, coming down this path into the open way. He stopped, looked, gathered himself up, and ran off across the street in the direction of a bye-road which led to the Rector's house. This direction took him considerably nearer the Wheatsheaf and the brawlers than the point he started from, and as Stephen and Jane suddenly bethought them that the bye-road in question led also to the constable's, and that Mr. Mills acted as a Justice of the Peace, so did Ben Cliffe and his son Henry below; and the two latter, leaving the fray, in which they had been taking great part, crossed Daly and stopped him, and striking him some severe blows,—for they were both powerful men,—they tripped him up, and stood over him as he lay on the ground.

Little Jane ran indoors and hid her face; Stephen and his mother looked gravely at each other, while old Joe broke out, "Ben shouldna ha' done it, Ben shouldna ha' done it; let the men alone, let the men alone."

Just then, as Stephen stood hesitating between the wish to stop any more blows, and dislike at having to interfere with his father, the appearance of a gentleman on horseback, followed by his groom, at the other end of the green, changed the face of affairs. The publican of the Wheatsheaf rented his inn of Mr. Hargrove, of Hargrove, a gentleman who set his face against all bad conduct; and somehow it came about that, while he was still several hundred yards off, there was little to be seen or heard of the fight that had been going on; but the Irish party gathered together, and proceeded, with louder speech than before, towards the stack-yard of the farmer who had given them work.

## CHAPTER II.

**B**EN Cliffe and Henry saw the same cause for dropping the matter in hand, and, letting Daly pick himself up, they started off pretty quickly down the side-street.

It was plain that poor Daly could scarcely stand. Stephen thought Mr. Hargrove was stopping, as he passed him, to ask what was the matter, but he had only pulled up to get his groom to alter his curb-chain, and Daly, who was then very near him, drew back rather into a house-shadow, and kept as quiet as if he had been the assailant instead of the victim.

"The poor fellow is not minded to make a fuss about it," said Jane.

"He'll not know Mr. Hargrove is a magistrate, perhaps," Stephen replied, "if he doesn't concern himself with the talk of these parts."

"I daresay he would not know you, Stephen," said Jane, after a minute; "you've so lately come home, and we're so little at grandfather's: couldn't you go over and help him a bit?"

Stephen went. "I hope," he said, shyly, "you are not much hurt?"

The man raised his face, and Stephen was pretty well answered, as far as bruises went. "At any rate," he went on, "you have not any bones broken."

"It's broken my collar-bone, I have," Daly replied, in the round-about way an Irishman turns his words.

"Which way do you want to go?"

Daly answered that he wished to go to the paddock near the Rectory, where there were some out-buildings, in one of which he was used to sleep.

Stephen helped him along there, and leaving him on his shake-down of straw in the wood-house, went off to the doctor's, whose house was high up the village.

"I shan't bring father into trouble by meddling to get the

man mended, and can keep my own counsel as to who knocked him down," he thought to himself.

He was rather disconcerted, therefore, when the doctor's maid-servant, who opened the door to him and heard that he wanted her master to go to a poor man who had broken his collar-bone, observed, meaningly, "Fell down, I suppose, and broke it—quite by accident?"

"He told me nothing, only that he had broken it," stammered Stephen; "but it wants setting anyhow;" and having mentioned where Daly was, he slipped off again to his grandfather's.

Here the whole family were seated at the tea which Ben and Henry's late return had delayed. "The Irishers—a shame—no business—see if he'll do it another year—thrashed them well—spying fellow—spoiled our game"—were some of the hotly-spoken words that greeted Stephen as he went in. His absence had not been much noticed by his father; nor had the latter any notice that it was of so short date; so he took his chair quietly, and no questions were asked.

Ben Cliffe was amongst the most respectable of the Howbury labouring men. His family had always been of good report in the village in old Joe's time and before him, and Ben himself had been taught his duty since the day when he was first mounted on a bench at the Sunday-school, when their grey-headed old Rector, Mr. Mills, was young. But though he had given himself to follow after duty and right in the main lines of his way of life, he was a man of some violence of temper, which showed itself in special dislikes. The yearly arrivals of poor Irishmen seeking for work in hay and harvest-time might have spoken to him of much want in their own island, and much will to pick up a little to lessen it honestly in ours. He might have thought what a good thing it is "to receive the fruits of the earth" undamaged "in their season," and thus contented himself, where wages were always pretty good, to see the high prices of hay-time and harvest-time last a little less long, while the crops could be quickly got in when the weather was best. But Ben was a fine mower and very able in all labour; he could do great things in cocking and carting, and clearing a field under

pressure of a falling weather-glass and threatening sky: he found himself less accounted of when hands were plenty, and began to join in the ill-natured talk which derided the feebler strength of the stranger labourers, while it was inconsistently angry at the smaller pay they would take, and worked himself up, summer after summer, against them, till his wife looked to hay-time as the special time of year when Ben was "unpleasant." The bad way, too common to Englishmen, of scoffing at men of other nations, gave an additional flavour to the tone in which he would talk of "them *Irish*;" and his eldest son, Henry, a rather heavy young man, who copied his father in everything, as he had worked with him from a child, was ready enough, without any particular ill-will of his own to them, to act in the same way. The second son, Stephen, had a great fancy for emigrating, and had been helped towards getting his wish well worked-out by Mr. Mills, Mr. Hargrove, and others, who thought it a worthy one, and founded on a real fitness for the hardy, adventurous life of a colony.

Till this evening Stephen and Stephen's future had for weeks past been the regular subjects of tea-table talk. To-night he sat silent and a little sorry; his eyes wandered about the well-known objects in old Joe's tidy cottage, almost as familiar to him as those of his own home; and the events of the last hour or two faded from his mind, to be replaced by such as the thoughts of his coming long absence, and of the life before him, were making familiar. These, again, were broken off by the entrance of the cousin, who had kept his house since his wife's death, and who had been out for the day; soon after which Mrs. Cliffe and Jane put on their bonnets and shawls, and Ben and his family set off to walk home.

Ben's cottage was nearer Marsham than Howbury: it stood very much out of the way, and was got at from the latter village by a narrow sunken lane of its own that was overlooked if you glanced in that direction across the neighbouring fields. Some people wondered what took Ben out so far from his work as Woodend Cottage, when he could easily have afforded to rent a better one in Howbury. The real reason was that it had a good bit of garden ground

about it, and Ben's strength and his son's, too, often outlasted six o'clock at night, and many a sweet turnip and savoury onion had Jane to peel and chop in consequence.

As the party got down to Marsham Wood, which they had to pass through, they saw a figure of a man sitting on the stile which stood out white against the darkness under the trees. On nearer inspection, the man proved to be one Jack Higgs, of Howbury, of by no means greater repute amongst gamekeepers now than he had been amongst owners of orchards as a boy. He slipped off the stile as Ben came up to it, and stood aside with a "Fine night," only, till Stephen, who was a little in the rear, was going to get over, when he said to him, "Good evening, Stephen Cliffe; I suppose Howbury 'll soon be seeing the last of you."

"It will not be long first," Stephen replied, coldly.

"You would not take a likely young fellow with you for company, now, would you?" Higgs said.

"When I see one," said Stephen, "I'll think about it;" and he disappeared into the dark wood path, while Jack laughed behind him.

"What *does* Jack Higgs wear that odd waistcoat for?" his sister was saying, as he got up to the rest.

"Got it cheap of the butcher, I should think," said her father.

This amused Jane, for Higgs's waistcoat consisted of nothing more nor less than the cured skin of a red and white calf, with the hair outwards, such as is now and then worn in some English villages.

Stephen was glad to hear his father's voice in a merrier tone, and dismissed from his mind the point it had begun lightly to turn over, what could have induced Jack Higgs, whom he scarcely knew but by sight, to speak to him as he did.

Mrs. Cliffe took the opportunity to tell her husband some family news that she had heard from Joe in the course of the day they had spent with him, and the rest of the walk seemed short, till they were all at their own door.



## CHAPTER III.

**L**AURENCE, or, as his countrymen called him, Larry Daly, had left his own place the season before, a childless man and a widower. Fever had put the last touch to the poverty against which he and his had long been struggling; and when he had buried his last, who loved him, he had nothing for it but to go off in search of work among strangers. When he was, as it so happened, cutting corn in the glebe-fields of an English village, the clergyman noticed him and his quiet, good conduct; and, finding him ready to stay on thereabouts while he could earn anything (having few to go back to, and none to take money to, to tempt him to spend part of his harvest-earnings in a speedy home-journey), proposed to him that, for a little daily sum, he should clear away the rubbish from some new buildings which the masons and plasterers had just completed. The poor man was thankful, and worked his best; but his strength was not great, nor was it expected to be, and the job took him several autumn weeks, till the weather got bad for moving about; so, knowing well how little he could live on, and having that little by him, with some prospects of renewing it by such odd jobs as he could pick up, Larry resolved to stay on in England the winter. Mr. Mills would not take from him the bundle of straw and cover of outhouse, which were his nightly resting-place; and so, with bread from old Molly's and water from the spring, patience and good-will, love of his Lord and thought of his lost ones, this poor fellow got on in his silent life.

None of the Howbury folk took him by the hand as one of themselves; there was an implied looking-down on him in many a glance and many a word. He was an *Irishman*, and Howbury did not give those three syllables a flattering twang when it happened to use them. Howbury villagers never asked themselves whether they were as intelligent, sociable, and obliging, on beans and bacon, mutton stews,

and good white bread, as many an Irishman (and Larry was such a one) is on wretched fare in his wretched hovel. Never had Larry seen such a meal in his life as Ben Cliffe sat down to every Sunday. "Harmless" was the usual word that buried all Larry's good qualities amongst folk who did not care to begin any intercourse with him; but if, at this rate, they could make him no friends, at least they made him no enemies; and as, if you bear *no* ill-will to a man whom you see constantly, brotherly kindness cannot be far behind, so Larry had not been a year in Howbury without some growing feeling towards him in Molly Woodcock, the baker, the Rectory servants, and a few other persons whom he came most across; and the patient fellow welcomed the touch of greater friendliness in a way that was little likely to put it back. Then came the arrival of other Irish with the ripening grass; and the first evening Larry spent amongst them, hearing the old familiar strain of thought and talk that made Farmer Wright's stack-yard a little Ireland to him for the time, seemed to offer a new balm of healing to the long heart-soreness that had come to him with the fever.

The second evening that was to have been so spent found Larry lying covered with painful bruises, and with a broken bone, some mile and a half from his newly returned friends, and not likely for days to be able to move. His little light had gone out again, and bodily pain was added in its place. Truly Ben Cliffe did not know what he was about, nor, even if he had learnt as much as the village-surgeon soon did of the injuries inflicted by his blows, would that have shown him all the wrong he had done poor Larry.

The surgeon's maid had been sent to fetch a jug of beer from the Wheatsheaf about the time the fray began, and had seen Cliffe and his son fall upon Daly, as he ran to fetch some one whose interference might stop it; and so it came that the doctor first, and then Mr. Mills, were very well aware by whom Larry had been hurt; while Ben Cliffe was walking home that same night with an uneasy shame upon him, and some fear of consequences,—neither of which he expressed aloud,—and Stephen, by his side, was wondering whether Larry knew his father by name,—whether his father knew how far his blows had gone,—and

whether the whole matter would come out, and get him into an open scrape or not.

Larry listened to the doctor and the clergyman as they stood over him, and made out, notwithstanding their indignation at Ben's handy-work of that evening, that he bore a better and pleasanter character in the village than poor Larry, judging from his cold-shouldering of himself, had given him in his own mind; he gathered also that it lay a good deal with himself whether Cliffe was or was not brought up to punishment for his assault; and as the talk turned that way, Larry groaned out, "It's myself that has been the father of children and known trouble; and I'll not be the one to bring another into it. If it's myself that must speak up against the man, yer honour, sure an' then never a word I'll say."

So Ben escaped the disgrace of being had up before a magistrate; but he had been a bit frightened during his hours of suspense, and so he kept quiet about Farmer Wright's Irish labourers, much to his wife's relief. Larry Daly was sent by Mr. Mills for a few weeks to an infirmary in a neighbouring town; the doctor's maid was not much of a gossip, and the few persons who mentioned Daly's hurt in Howbury supposed that it had been got in the general scuffle in front of the Wheatsheaf. Before Larry could turn himself over without pain, that scuffle and all that had to do with it were forgotten.

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#### CHAPTER IV.

THE year had left Midsummer weeks behind, and was well on towards Michaelmas; the time fixed for Stephen Cliffe's start for New Zealand was near at hand, and almost all his outfit was bought and got ready, when his mother and sister, who had been hard at work lately over it, found themselves left one evening alone. It happened thus:—Stephen had many friends to take leave of, and for this purpose had been staying a night here and a

night there in the neighbouring villages. He had been expected home on the evening in question. About the middle of the day, which was a Tuesday, Henry had come in with the news that a certain "Uncle Joe," who was in service on the other side of the country, was to be at Grayborough Fair to sell a horse on the Thursday following; and it had been hastily determined that the men of the family at Woodend should try and meet him there, and that the best thing would be, as the roads were heavy with the late rain and the distance sixteen miles, for Henry and his father to walk to Grayborough that afternoon, and so be there to see the people coming in for the fair on Wednesday, and have a bit of time to rest and enjoy themselves before they walked home again, as there was a job of work which compelled them to be home on the Thursday afternoon. Stephen might then follow them on the Wednesday.

It was pleasant to Mrs. Cliffe and Jane to think of Stephen's coming in to tea, and the latter made haste to finish her ironing, that she might walk into Marsham to get a few crumpets and some fresh butter. She was home again just before their usual tea-hour, and helped to set out a tempting little meal. The evening was fair, but, owing to the quantity of rain that had lately fallen, there was a great deal of damp rising; so Jane made up the fire, that they might keep it in for cheerful warmth after its boiling and toasting uses were over, and mother and daughter sat down cheerily to wait—cheerily enough at first; but they waited till a whole potful of hot water had had time to steam itself away, and they were fain putting aside all extra treats, to take the meal for their own refreshment. Their little fit of unusual expectation was succeeded by one of disappointed and wearying wonderment. "What could have become of Stephen? What was likely to keep him, and he so thoughtful?"

At last the tea-things were washed up and cleared away in despair. "Stephen would come before bed-time." Mrs. Cliffe took up some knitting, and lit a candle. Jane, who was something of a scholar, got hold of an old "Gardeners' Chronicle"—a newspaper that Mr. Mills sent round to some of his parishioners—and began looking it over.

Bed-time came, and no Stephen. Mrs. Cliffe drew in to

the bit of fire, and the noise she made with her chair woke up Jane, who had been nodding, with a start.

"Mother," said Jane, "what a turn you did give me! How I wish Stephen would come in! I feel quite timor-some, like."

"You are tired, child," said her mother; "you should have stopped quiet, and not gone into Marsham, after finishing all those shirts and collars. We want Stephen for company, but not to take care on us. What is there to jump at?"

"I don't know, mother; but I was reading just now in the paper how a house was broken into where there was known to be money, and how people should always keep their money safe at the bank; and there is that twenty pounds of Stephen's passage-money that father has got together, every bit of it in the house; and the other night, before I thought of that, I was lying awake, and fancied I heard some one raising the door-latch: I went and looked out of window, but there was nothing; only I fancied, just in the same uncertain sort of way, that I heard round the corner the sound of a very short, low laugh."

When Jane mentioned the money in the house, Mrs. Cliffe had sat up in her chair and looked slowly round about the room, but she had not said anything. When Jane stopped, she spoke straight to her thoughts:—"How is any bad folk to know that we are only women in the house just to-night, when your father and Henry went quite on the sudden, and Stephen was to have been home?"

Jane could not show that it was likely they should know, but still she repeated she wished Stephen was home.

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## CHAPTER V.

**M**ASTER George Mills had a favourite grey pony; it was a well-made animal, only rather too strongly built to be graceful; but this was all the better for the pony, as it often carried his father as well as himself; and

Master George had no notion of sparing it many a good canter, because his father had ridden on it from one end of his parish to the other in the morning.

Larry knew this pony, and admired it, and Master George upon it, not a little. Their acquaintance had begun in this way:—It was a hot autumn day of the year before, while Larry was engaged in removing rubbish, that he was sitting eating his usual crust very thirstily, and chewing some leaves of the plant called wild sorrel—or, as some call it, green sauce—to serve him instead of the water he was just then too tired to go and fetch, when the Rector's young son rode up on his pony, and, after talking to him a bit, had suddenly bade him hold it, and, climbing the wall of the orchard under which Larry was sitting, had returned with his cap full of juicy apples and pears, which he emptied down by the poor Irishman's crust; then jumped up and was off. Larry's grateful heart made him taste these apples over again whenever he saw Master George and the grey pony. He had been two or three weeks returned from the infirmary, and continued, with Mr. Mills's encouragement, to pick up a little work about Howbury, when one night the somewhat frail door of the outbuilding in which he slept was hastily battered at from without, and he heard the voice of the Rector's gardener, who seemed to be explaining that he was wanted to go somewhere.

"Is it yer wife, then, that's worse?" asked Larry from within, as he got up to unbar the door; "if I can run for you anywhere, sure I'll do it willing!"

"No, no," said the gardener; "my mistress is as bad as she can be, but it is not for that you are wanted. Here is master's grey pony been stolen out of the field, and we think it will have been taken to Grayborough Fair to be sold. Master says, 'Can you find your way to Grayborough, and should you know the pony again by sight, and will you start at once after it?'"

Larry was ready and confident, and it was explained to him that it was feared that the thief would part with the pony at Grayborough first thing in the morning, which was a Wednesday, the first and lesser day of the fair there for horses, and get off, very probably, after having made a good bargain, while he escaped the publicity of the great Thurs-

day's concourse. If this guess were right, the only hope of recovering the animal without extra trouble would be to start after it before morning broke.

So Larry Daly set off, armed with a thick stick that the gardener lent him, and stored with his descriptions of the right turns and shortest cuts to Grayborough.

He walked three or four miles as steadily as possible, and then threw himself under a hedge to get a little rest. The moon had been out in a haze a little while before, but just then the night was very dark. Larry had been lying quiet for some minutes, when he thought he heard the sound of voices in the field behind him. Talk was going on there, probably in much coarser words than Larry and other persons who told his story afterwards used to repeat it, but its substance was as follows:—

"You have managed about that second young chap; have you, Bill?" a man said.

A boy's voice answered, "Ay, ay—he's all right! You see, when I'd been and told Jack how a chap in livery came into the public and told Henry how he'd meet his uncle in Grayborough, and how Henry had gone off to tell his father, says Jack to me, 'You hang on a bit about the public, and see: maybe they'll come through Howbury for Grayborough to-night.' So I waited on, and it wasn't more nor an hour or two before Ben Cliffe came by, and Henry with him, and the chap in livery was still sitting down before the Wheatsheaf. So they went up to him, both on them, and says they, 'If we *are* going to Grayborough, we may as well go for two nights as one; but we are not in luck about Stephen, for he would like to see his uncle Joe before he leaves the old country, and he is not to be at home till to-night from South Marsham.' So I off, and tells Jack, says I, 'You've only got two on 'em off the nest now: there's Stephen not with them, and he is expected down at Woodend to-night.' 'He's worst of all,' says Jack—'as strong as me and that London chap put together, and a deal more wide-awake nor Henry.' So says I, 'Could not I make believe as I was going to South Marsham, and tell Stephen Cliffe as his father took the opportunity to send to him to go after him to Grayborough to-night?' 'You've hit it, Bill,' he says; and so off I went, and made up the

message as civil as might be, with a touch that will serve us about that big Henry."

"And crammed it down the throat of the wide-awake chap?" the man asked, with a laugh.

"Well, I was not quite easy about that job," answered the boy; "but, as luck had it, Nancy Halliday opened the door to me (Stephen was staying with Tom Halliday at South Marsham); and I gived her word for Stephen, as she said was round with Tom at the back; and then I says, 'Please, ma'am, may I leave word for Mr. Cliffe with you, for I've another errand some way down, and it is getting late?' So she says, 'Yes—I'll tell him;' and I goes off and lies by, and sees Stephen coming along; and he takes the turn for Grayborough, and not for Woodend—so he's all right."

"Well," said the other, "I had word from Dickinson to watch on this road, and send off if the man and his son came back again with their faces home; but it is not likely."

"You've watched here late enough," said the boy's voice again; "and I was to say that Dickinson did not feel easy about that gipsy-fellow we thought of: so he was to lift the Parson's horse himself" (Larry pricked up his ears), "and will have got him by this time up on the Liverpool road, three or four miles beyond Woodend. Jack is game to go in for the main job by himself, and you and I are to be in the lane by one o'clock—you to help Jack, and me to run with orders to Dickinson if all does not go right."

Larry's head was getting into a whirl: he had learnt the whereabouts of the grey pony; he had learnt also a scheme of intended mischief, which he, as a Christian man, seemed called upon to stop. Plotting to get father and sons out of a house told plainly enough of robbery—perhaps murder—intended there. That the father of the threatened household was the same Englishman who had set upon and beaten him, Larry knew perfectly; but, for all that, he felt bound to try and turn aside the threatened danger. He was only sorry that, while he knew the man's name so well, he did not know where he lived. For a moment he thought of finding his way to South Marsham, and there asking for



the man whose name he had heard mentioned as young Cliffe's entertainer there, and telling him all he had overheard, and rousing him to go with help to the Woodend; but, on thinking this scheme over, he saw two objections: first, his own Irish accent and rags, and the bare feet which had been so useful in preventing the plotters from overhearing his footsteps, might cause him to be mistrusted; secondly, Woodend was so far from South Marsham, that he feared he would be too late to prevent what was brewing against Cliffe's house.

As Larry saw no chance of giving alarm beforehand to the woman-tenants of the cottage at Woodend, if such there were, he could only decide on following the boy "Bill" and his older companion, when they began to move off; but they were shod and he was not, and a highroad is pleasanter walking than a stubble-field to the barefoot. He began to fall behind far more than was well, and to fear that, without more effort than was possible for him, he should lose sight of his unconscious guides altogether. He kept up at a safe distance by the faint light of a moon behind clouds, over the stubble-field and a bit of heathery common; then missed the figures he was following at a turn in a copse, and sat down wondering what he could do next: his feet pained him from the stubble; as he seated himself they came on to a little bed of moist leaves, whose soothing touch refreshed him so that he could think more clearly. He had not the least notion what time of night it was when the gardener called him, or by the distance he had walked before he lay down under the hedge he might have guessed how long it was before the "one o'clock," when the two ill-minded fellows were to be, as the boy had said, in a certain lane near the scene of their plottings. He sat piecing together every scrap that could help him; but little came of it, till suddenly the notes of a church-clock striking twelve boomed through the damp night air from no great distance.

"There's twelve by South Marsham," said a voice to his right.

The men he had been following were in the copse still. Larry strained his ears to hear more, while he grasped more firmly the gardener's stout stick.

"If it weren't that it is light a bit now and might

chance to get pitch-dark again, we might stay here awhile," said the man's voice of the two.

"It'll never be so dark that we can't see the fir-trees up against the sky at Marsham Wood Head," the boy replied; "we go over by those, and then keep round the wood on the South Marsham side till we can see the brook running across the road. If there's a bit of light in the sky, it'll shine in the water; and when I see it, I can hit into Cliffe's Lane from there in any light. There's a nice snug thick hedge atop of that to lie by in."

"'T won't do to lie too snug for Jack and all," observed the other.

"Left side—easy whistle of third cropped old ash—they was the points to find us by," said the boy, sharply; "the hedge is very thick just there."

Larry was many degrees wiser than before. At Marsham Wood Head was the stack-yard where his Irish friends had been housed by Farmer Wright in the hay-season. He knew enough now of places to go before the two burglars, and took advantage of the moon's passing behind a cloud, to steal out of the copse. Keeping as much as possible in shadow, he struck out from the firs that were so plain land-marks, and, finding the brook, he was beginning to look about for an opening to a lane, when a foot-fall sent him back into a thick black hollow, luckily on the shady side of the way, for just then the moon shone out unclouded, and showed him a man stepping by with a stealthy, quick tread. Larry had seen him before. The night he was amongst the Irish at Marsham Wood Head, a fellow had been loitering about who had attracted his notice by wearing a waistcoat of cured hide with the hair on, and whom he had then heard to be questioning some of them closely as to their journey from Liverpool, and the places they had found lodging in at nights. He wore a dark velvetene coat and gaiters; the head of a pistol stuck out from an under pocket, and checked a slight impulse which Larry had conceived of using his stick upon him.

No; he would let him pass, and, looking after him, learn what he had yet to find—the way up "Cliffe's Lane."

That he soon did. The lane was so hollow a one, that no person walking in it could possibly see another who held

the level of the fields it cut through. Larry was sharp enough to feel sure of this, and, presently getting down into the entrance of it, climbed up the bank, and holding himself low, set off along the hedge that traced its boundary.

Jane Cliffe, as we know, had got into a little fluster about house-breakers that same evening, and had persuaded her mother to burn a candle in her room where she had begged to be allowed to sleep with her; and so it came about that Larry had not run far when he saw before him, not a cottage, for that he might well have missed, but what was plainly a light in a cottage window, and as such he made straight for it.

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## CHAPTER VI.

IT was getting lateish in the day for a long walk, when Stephen Cliffe turned up towards Grayborough, leaving the way home to Woodend behind him. When the night had drawn well in, his father and brother were comfortably settled in the kitchen of the Black Bull there, whose landlady, Mrs. Franklin, was an old Howbury woman. Ben, in a wide, wooden arm-chair in the chimney corner, was resting his head on his hand, and his elbow on his knee, and talking to her as she prepared something at the fire; Henry was stretched along a settle asleep.

"Yes, we managed to get together a good little heap," Ben was saying, "what with some I could spare out of my wages, and presents from some of the gentlemen about,—for we have good neighbours amongst them, as you know, Mrs. Franklin,—but it's mostly spent now in fitting him out a bit, and does not go to pay for getting him across the sea!"

"That'll not cost a little, I expect," said the landlady.

"A matter of between twenty and thirty pounds,—no joke to us labouring folk; but it is worth while, they say, and sets up a fine fellow, like Stephen, once for all."

"Henry," called his father, suddenly, as if something

had struck him; and, getting a sleepy "Yes, father," he went on, "you're quite sure as Stephen was coming home to-night for certain?"

"He told me yesterday, when I saw him a minute in South Marsham, 'I shall be at home to-morrow afore you're in to your tea:' besides, he always was a'coming home on Tuesday."

"I wish we had sent him a bit of word to make sure on't, Harry," said his father; "there's that money in the house."

"My word!" said the landlady; "and queer folk about, too, at Grayborough Fair time."

"Oh! we don't hear or see much of the Fair down at Howbury," Ben remarked; "it's out of our beat; I'd never have given it a thought if it had not been for meeting Joe here a' Thursday; we're a step too far off for the queer folk to trouble us."

"Well, I hope Stephen's at home, I am sure," said the landlady; "your mistress might fret about that money, being alone with Jane, if it was no worse."

"I'd a deal better have got it into the Bank," said Ben, "if it was but for a week or two; but, with three stout men in the house, one did not think of such a thing; and now here's two away, and one uncertain, all in a jiffy."

"Don't you worrit about it, Mr. Cliffe," said the landlady; "Stephen's not for to call uncertain."

"Uncertain! I hope not, I am sure, Mrs. Franklin," said a cheery voice at the door; "at least I make no doubt but it's pleasant to come and see."

But at the sight of Stephen Cliffe's tall figure and bright face, flushed with his walk, his father and the hostess both jumped on to their feet, with "Mercy on us, Stephen! why aren't you at home? Dear-a-me, Mr. Stephen, you here?"

"Is this the way they receive folks at the Black Bull?" said Stephen, taken aback, but laughing; "what ever's the matter? Didn't you send for me, father?"

"Send for you!" cried out Henry, and all at once.

Stephen was a quick fellow, and looked suddenly grave: "You with father, too, Henry!" he said; "why, that lying chap——"

"What lying chap?" cried they all.

"Some young dog out of Howbury, as he said, who left word with Nancy Halliday, as father was gone off on the sudden to meet Uncle Joe here, and wanted me to be after him, '*as he had left my brother at home.*' It sounded natural-like enough," added Stephen, as if vexed with himself for not having seen through a stone wall.

"No blame to you, Stephen, my boy," said his father; "but I don't like the look of this at all."

"No," answered Stephen, "if anybody had been playing off a hoax upon me, he would not have sent me here, where all's right about Uncle Joe; and a friend wanting to let me know need not have told lies about Henry and a message from you. *I was just wanted away from Woodend by somebody*,—that's where it is, and it can't be for any good."

They all saw this, and were thinking what to do, when Mrs. Franklin suggested the Liverpool mail. It was due at the Borough Arms, the chief hostel of the place, at half-past twelve, and if it set them down at Snowdon, a village three miles from their own cottage, they might manage to be there at half-past two, quicker by far than they could have got there on foot by night-walking, especially after the stiff sixteen miles they had had already. They settled to wait for it. Stephen thought within himself that the same persons who had watched and got them all off to Grayborough would take pretty good care to get their business done at Woodend before the mail could bring them back again, as they would be not unlikely to come when the false message was discovered by his own appearance there; but there was no good in saying so, so he kept this to himself. Mrs. Franklin was sure to see Uncle Joe in the fair, and was to tell him that his brother and nephews had done their best to have a look at him, and how it all was. She employed herself in doing the best for her guests with her easiest seats and some good food and hot ale, till the mail was due, and it was time for them to stir again.

## CHAPTER VII.

WHEN Larry Daly found himself at Cliffe's door, the fear came over him that he himself might be mistrusted; and he halted, hesitating there a few minutes, till the notion came into his head that he would say he had come from the Rectory, and so use his first errand of that night to satisfy the women within.

When his low knocking had obtained a "Who's there?" he said, "It is Larry Daly from the Rectory I am — the man that does jobs about for his Riverence. The grey pony has been stole out of the field, and the gardener can't leave his wife; and they think the pony 'll maybe be sold at Grayborough in the early morning. They sent me to be beforehand with the thief as has taken it; but I don't rightly know my way, and it's wandering I've been over the fields till it'll be ill gitting on when I find the road again. I'm very tired and hungry; and if you would give me a rest and a bit of bread and cheese, and set me straight, it's obliged to you I'd be!"

Mrs. Cliffe was not inclined to open the door; but Jane was, luckily, quite at ease when she heard it was Larry, as she had a good opinion of him, as we have seen; and after an anxious minute or two, he found himself quietly inside the cottage, without too great loss of precious time. There was a clock before him: it wanted ten minutes to one — the time when the "Jack" who was to attack the cottage had appointed his comrades to be in the lane. When he had made sure they were at hand, he would be coming on.

Larry was glad to see that the younger woman was one he had often noticed coming to the Rectory with clean clothes, and who knew him well by sight, though he had not known till now that she was Ben Cliffe's daughter. The moment Larry saw the women were at ease with him, he went on from the subject of the stolen pony to tell them what threatened them. They were neither of them cowards; and in the face of real danger, with something to do against

it, and an ally in the Irishman, Jane plucked up her courage. By Larry's direction, beds and heavy furniture were pushed up against all the windows and outer doors of the cottage. There was an old gun over the mantelpiece; Mrs. Cliffe got Larry to load it, and he stationed himself with it in a low room where there was a window that looked out on to the roof of a lean-to, by which Larry thought it very likely the burglar would try to get into the house.

The money, which the women saw plainly was his object, they thrust under a loose stone in the cellar, and then kept themselves quiet in the room next to Larry.

Presently the latter saw, through a peep-hole he had made in the eaves, the man who had passed him in the lane come into the little garden. At the sight of ticking and furniture-backs pressed against each window-pane, he looked surprised, and, after walking twice round the house, went away, but was not long in reappearing with another man at his heels. The first then set himself to climb the lean-to, saying to his companion, "It's only that the women got frit o' being alone." Just as he was in the most awkward position for getting out of its way, he saw the muzzle of a gun protruding from under the eaves above him: there was a report, and he fell to the ground, bringing many of the slates clattering after him. The second man ran off, and Larry, who knew there were no more to come, went out and drew the one he had wounded in-doors, and, with the women's help, tied him fast to the legs of a bed. They were sorry enough to know him for Jack Higgs, whoever and whatever his accomplices might be. Larry reloaded, and all three waited and waited lest a second attempt should be made against them, till they once more heard the sound of steps.

How Ben and his sons came in, and everything was explained—how Larry was thanked and shaken hands with all round—how Ben and Henry crept down the lane to the third cropped old ash by the bottom on the left side, and collared the man and boy who were still there in hiding (the Cliffes had come up from Howbury in another direction)—how Larry was left to keep watch over Higgs, while Stephen ran a mile and more to Hargrove Park, woke up the woman at the lodge, who roused up the head groom,

who mounted Stephen and himself on horses that would go, and rode across country after "Dickinson" and the stolen grey—how the Rector's pony was safely brought back—how Larry was a friend from that time forth—may well be supposed.

Jack Higgs, his brother Bill, and the two strange house-breakers, fell under the severe punishment of the law.

Larry Daly was eventually helped out to New Zealand, where he is now one of the most useful shepherds on "Stephen's run."

Mr. Mills long quoted a speech of poor Larry's, in answer to a word Mr. Mills had dropped to him on the help he had been to the man who had hurt him:—"Sure, sir, and it's revenge as much as may be; for it was broke a bone he did in my neck, and I have shot out a hard place in his heart."

If one thing is more certain than another, it is that Mrs. Cliffe never again knew Ben to be "unpleasant" when Irish haymakers wandered into Howbury.



# GOD'S HAMMER.

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## CHAPTER I.

**T**HE early twilight of December was fast brightening, into the clear, cold moonlight of a frosty evening, when John Miller, the cobbler of the little village of Fernlea, traversed with echoing steps the frozen road towards the blacksmith's forge, the ruddy glow from which was most inviting to those who had small means of warming themselves at home. Perhaps it was as much from the bodily comfort it afforded, as on account of the blacksmith's cheerful, hearty humour, that this said forge was the general place of meeting for the villagers when the day's work was over; and amongst them John Miller was always to be found. He was a hunchback, and possessed a good deal of the sarcastic shrewdness often found amongst the deformed, but it was tempered by great good-nature; and "My Lord," as the villagers chose to call him, on account of his hump, was one of the most popular persons in the village.

"A merry Christmas to you, Master Knight," he said, as he crossed the threshold, "and a happy New Year when it comes."

Master Knight nodded an answer, for at the moment he and his assistant, a tall, good-humoured lad, known in the village as "Kie Brochway," were performing a not in-harmonious duet with their hammers, which was accompanied by a shower of sparks.

Miller took his seat as near the glowing fire as he could,

produced a short pipe, lighted and began to smoke it, looking meantime observingly at the work in hand.

"There!" he exclaimed, as the brawny smith paused and wiped his brow, "that's finely straightened; but it took a deal of labour and many a hard blow. I often think when I sit a-watching you and Kie, that your work's summat like what happens to us. We all need a deal o' hammerin' one way or t'other to put us straight."

The lad Kie stared as if puzzled, but his master laughed, and replied,—

"Ay, that's just one of your ways of thinking, My Lord. I believe you never sees anything done but you finds out a likeness to summat else in it. Now I can't say as it would have struck me; but you are in the right. We *do* want a deal o' hammerin' before we be shaped as we ought, no doubt."

"The lad don't understand us," said My Lord, smiling at Kie's astonished face. "Your master don't make no personal allusions to *me*, Kie. It ain't my handsome hump he is a speakin' of, but of our bad ways, and the evil that's *in* us, that must be hammered out. And the hammers used for us is precious hard ones, my boy. Hunger, and pain, and sorrow, be the three heaviest on 'em."

And My Lord, pleased at his own skill in concocting an allegory, gave a long whiff of his pipe, and glanced complacently at the blacksmith. Master Knight shook his head impressively, as if to say, "Very true, as we know to our cost," and resumed his work. At that moment another footstep echoed on the hard ground, and a tall, fine-looking man, having a basket of tools slung across his shoulders, stopped as he passed the forge.

"A good evening to you, Master Knight," said the newcomer. "The day is uncommon short now; isn't it?"

"Very short, indeed, Master Fairly. It is but on the stroke of five now, and more moonlight than daylight. But clear, seasonable weather for Christmas."

"Ay," said Fairly, "they say a green Christmas makes a full churchyard, and maybe 'tis so; but I have noticed the contrary sometimes."

"And where be you going now, Master Fairly?" asked Miller; "this ain't your way homewards."

"No," said the carpenter, "I have got a job in the church-tower. The woodwork in the belfry wants repairing; and as in there, among the bells, it's well-nigh dark at midday, I thought I could do it now, with the help of my lamp and this bright moon."

"Have a care, then, that the ringers don't surprise you," said the blacksmith; "best fasten the door of the tower when you go in."

"Oh! the job's not a long one, I take it, and I shall have done long before they want to chime. A good day to you."

And with a firm, heavy step George Fairly moved on.

"A hard-workin', industrious man, that," said the blacksmith, talking as he fashioned his work. "It's work—work—work, from morn till eve with George Fairly. Why, he will rise at day-dawn, and walk miles for a job."

"Yes," said Miller, shaking the ashes out of his pipe; "and that's what wants hammering out of him."

"What?" asked the blacksmith, pausing in surprise.

"Ay, it does though! Why, man, we may over-do everything. George Fairly thinks o' naught but gain. He's a thriving man and a thrifty man, and a clever workman. He don't drink, and he's a kind husband and father, but his heart's set on this world, and his thoughts don't go beyond his work. He don't work o' Sundays, 'cause it ain't decent and respectable to do so; but he'll walk pretty nigh all that blessed day, giving up his church and all, for the sake of a job on the Monday, that he couldn't get to without it. And when he is at home o' Sundays he is for ever a-fretting for the morrow, not enjoying his rest of the seventh day like a good Christian. He've told me, a many times that it were a dull day for him. Now that's what I call toilin' and moilin' too much; and lovin' one's work too much a deal. And it'll be hammered out of him. It will, be sure."

And My Lord resumed his pipe.

"But still," said the good-natured blacksmith, "it ain't for himself that he toils. It's all for that lad o' his, and a sharp lad he is, surely. George Fairly is a man as reads, and he says that learning is better than house and land, and that if he can but get money enough to make a scholard of Harry, he may live to see his son a parson."

"Now *that*," cried My Lord, with a wave of his pipe; "*that* I call Ambition! Why, if he don't look out, he will be turning Chartist or summat awful! Why can't he let Harry do his duty in that state o' life to which it has pleased God to call him? That's what I say. We don't want parsons of George's makin', I'm sure; and if he did get Harry to be a make-believe gentleman, it's to be feared he wouldn't have much comfort of his son. A great scholard wouldn't care, perhaps, to talk with his old ignorant father and mother. If he hadn't a good heart, maybe, he'd look down on 'em."

"No, I don't hold noways with the new-fangled notions of pushing upwards and trying to be more than we were used to. My boys shall live by the old forge as I and my father have."

"You're a wise man, Master Knight," said My Lord. "It's better to my thinkin' to be a mouse than a bat, which is neither a beast nor a bird, and that is what them as is always trying to push upwards are like."

The blacksmith here began hammering again, and Miller was compelled to be silent. He was shortly afterwards joined by a few other stragglers from the village, who smoked and chatted with him, till the blacksmith's work being ended, and the church clock striking eight, Master Knight joined the party. At the same moment the rich peal of the church-bells burst on the air, hailing the eve of the Nativity with their customary music.

"The ringers are early to-night," said Miller.

"Yes: I saw them half-an-hour ago down at the Blue Boar, complaining of the bitter cold — such young lads wouldn't have thought of cold in *my* day," said an old villager, "and I advised 'em to go up t' church and warm themselves with ringing."

The chimes rang on. The gossips of the forge listened, soothed by the air-music, which brought back, even to their every-day minds, strange and tender memories.

"Ah!" said an aged ploughman, with a deep breath, "there ain't nothing like the bells! I do love 'em, that I do. When the Mormon-man was a-wantin' me to go to his fine city, all of gold and silver, in North Ameriky, I says to him, says I, 'Are your church-bells silver or gold now?' 'Church

bells !' says he, a-sneerin' like, ' we an't none.' ' Oh !' says I, ' then that won't do for me. I never was out of sound of 'em yet, and I won't never be, if I can help it.' "

" Please, Master Knight, is father here ?" asked a pretty, childish voice, and a little girl of about eight or nine years old advanced into the light of the forge.

" Here! no, my child. Why, ain't he come home yet ?"

" No, sir, please, and mother is uneasy, she says."

" Why he went to the church-tower to do a job in the belfry, more nor two hours ago !" cried the blacksmith.

" Oh, then, that's why the lads found the door open just now," said James West. " It was a careless trick of Master Fairly not to lock it."

" The door open, and he not home !" cried My Lord, springing to the ground, with an exclamation we may not repeat, though the earnestness of the moment made it scarcely a breach of the commandment. " He is there! He will be killed ! Beat to pieces with the bells ! My lads! my lads! for heaven's sake run and stop them !"

And setting the example himself, My Lord ran off with marvellous swiftness, considering his misshapen form ; but he was soon overtaken and out-distanced by the others, who put forth all their speed,—as they had need,—for life and death at that moment hung on their fleetness of foot.

And as they ran up the village and down the lane, at the end of which the grey church rose in solemn beauty in the still moonlight, how cruel sounded every stroke of the bells which had been so kindly and joyful but a few moments before !

They were passing bells now.

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## CHAPTER II.

**I**T was with a mind full of busy thoughts, although " he whistled as he went," that George Fairly strode with his firm, determined step up the village and down the lane towards the church. So deeply was he engrossed in a train of reflections and calculations, that, though he pulled the

tower door after him when he entered, he quite forgot the fact that it was Christmas Eve and the blacksmith's warning, and mounted the dark staircase (the tower was three stories high) almost unconsciously, till, issuing through a trap-door at the summit, he found himself in the belfry which was the pride of Fernlea.

No one could well be more prosaic in character than the carpenter; he was one of those working-bees who are too busy to heed the fact that a flower possesses beauty as well as honey; he walked about God's beautiful universe with eyes closed to its loveliness; but as he issued into the square chamber of the bells, he could not help pausing with a momentary feeling of admiration and awe. The moonlight was falling in long rays between the *louvres*, or pieces of wood which crossed the belfry windows; and the white solemn light, striking the metal, just defined the monster form of the great bells, and revealed partially the groined and arched roof.

But George Fairly had his work to do, and so he was soon kneeling amongst the bells, busy repairing the floor. The job was a longer one than he expected. The planks of the flooring were so old that they would scarcely bear hammering into the places from which they had started, and several holes in them needed piecing. He had to go for more wood; and six, and seven, and the three-quarters after, sounded before the job was finished. Then he recollected that the clergyman had told him there was something to be done to the *louvres* of the east window (through which the moonlight stole with such unusual brilliancy), and he went to look at them.

The windows were very high up in the wall—so high that he was obliged to take some steps which lay on a corner of the floor, and, mounting on them, to examine the *louvres*. The wood seemed to him of the same age as the flooring; and he was just reflecting whether it would not be better to replace the *louvres* with entirely new ones, instead of patching them up, when eight struck on the church clock! Almost immediately after, a dull noise—a sort of hum of metal—resounded behind him—the echo, as he thought, of the clock, and he did not even look round. The next moment a violent blow on both legs and feet, causing

intense pain, would have knocked him off the ladder had he not been holding by the *louvre*. By a strong effort—the mere instinct of pain—he at once drew himself from the steps on to the window-sill, holding himself flat against it by grasping the best of the *louvres*; and then, turning his head, he beheld all the great bells in movement, and was stunned by the roar and the crash. If he had been still kneeling beneath them!—he shuddered at the thought. The next moment the peril of his present position rushed on his mind. The old wood to which he clung might yield to his weight, and he might fall. The very rush and wind made by the great bell rendered it difficult (added to the bewildering noise) to remain still and firm; and a weaker and less resolute man than George Fairly would have fainted from agony at the severe injury he had already received. He shouted loudly for aid. Alas! what hope of being heard amid that roar!

As if disdaining him, the Christmas-bells rang out their merriest peal. Clinging still—in his sharp agony and helplessness—the carpenter called aloud to God for aid. It was such a prayer as the busy, self-reliant mechanic had never breathed before. He had no time for religion—he had been wont to say—just yet; and if, sometimes, serious subjects were broached among his fellow-workmen in the town, his strong practical sense inclined him to smile with disdain at those who were fanatical or enthusiastic, and to doubt, with that far greater number who embraced the shallow but specious philosophy of the infidel. But now, in his hour of need, George Fairly prayed.

The prayer seemed answered, for there was a cessation in the ringing; and feeling himself incapable of holding on a moment longer, he again threw himself, awkwardly and with agonised effort, on the ladder, in order to let himself down to the floor. Alas! at that moment the ringers gave one more pull, recommencing the chime, and again the blow struck his legs and feet: consciousness failed him, and he fell heavily to the ground.

Happily for our hero, that one movement of the great bell was the last; and in both instances it had not acquired its full and highest swing.

It was at that instant that the voice of the village

runners reached the ears of the ringers, and the "Stop!—stop!" of half-frantic speakers was heard in the pause between the chimes.

Hurriedly the blacksmith and the others told their reason for the interruption. They were heard with horror.

"He can't be alive if he was kneeling among the bells," said one of the lads. "We've been a-ringing like mad to-night. Old Ben will have beat him to pieces!"

"Well, let us make haste up," said the blacksmith, and, hurrying on, he was the first through the trap-door.

"Is he alive?" cried the cobbler, as his head issued from the same opening.

"God knows! His head ain't crushed. Here—help me bring him down!"

And with the tenderest precaution the two men bore the stalwart but insensible form of the carpenter down between them. The ringers crowded round.

"Is he alive?" was asked by many eager voices.

"We can't tell; but you must run for a doctor at once, Kie," said the blacksmith; and Kie departed at speed.

Then they got an old shutter, and placed the injured man upon it, covering his crushed limbs with a coat, and prepared to bear him homewards.

As they were about to leave the tower in this dismal procession, Miller stumbled over something.

"What's here?" he cried—"a boy! What are you doing, youngster, under one's feet?"

There was no answer; and the cobbler, stooping, raised the little form in his arms.

"It's Harry Fairly!" he exclaimed. "How came he here?"

"He was taking a pull of one of the bell-ropes along o' Crew," was the reply.

"I never thought of the poor little fellow! He's a'most frightened to death, it seems!"

"Let us carry him out into the air—he's in a swoond!" said the cobbler. "Alack, and no wonder!—to be a-helpin' to crush his own father!"

And the two men carefully bore poor little Harry Fairly after his father.

Whilst they are on the road to the carpenter's home,



we will take the opportunity of introducing him and his family more fully to our readers.

George Fairly, the carpenter of Fernlea, was a man of great intelligence and honesty. The talent which, employed on other and higher pursuits, would probably have made him distinguished in any position of life, was not wasted, even in his station. He made the best of his opportunities, exercised in his trade reflection, observation, and ingenuity, and at his leisure hours read and studied mechanics. He married early, selecting his wife, not from fancy of the eye, but judgment of the head. He required a thrifty, neat, quiet housewife, and he found her. He was fond of her and kind to her; but the great love of his heart—and it was strong, as all George's seldom-awakened feelings were—was bestowed upon his son, his first-born. George had never been what men call "in love;" he had not had time for the feeling when he married; and his unexercised affections poured themselves forth, consequently, on the boy in an unusual flood of tenderness. The child was, indeed, from his infancy a charming little fellow—pretty as a pictured cherub when a babe; singularly acute and intelligent as a child. His father found he could scarcely teach him as fast as the boy learned; and, proud of the admiration which such precocious talents created, and of the praises which the village schoolmaster bestowed on him, wild dreams of ambition awoke in George's mind: he determined that his son should have every advantage of education that he could obtain for him by his own hard labour; and, as Miller said, he toiled all day—and night, too, at times—to obtain the means of fulfilling this cherished desire. Time and strength meant to him only a gift for his Harry: he had no future in his mind save the future of his son; and the purpose was so good and pious, that it actually blinded him to the sin of making an idol of his child.—Thus the Christmas Eve found him.

Little Phœbe, terrified at the words of the cobbler, stood petrified with a dim sense of danger; then, as the men ran off, she uttered a cry of affright, and with the fleetness and instinct of childhood darted off to her home. Her mother stood at the door, looking out for her husband.

"Mother—mother!" cried the shrill little voice, as she approached—"Oh, mother! father will be killed with the bells! He is in the big tower!"

The mother uttered a cry of terror, and sprang forwards.

"Who told you so?" she cried, seizing the child by the shoulder, and shaking her.

"My Lord; and he's run, and all of them, to the church. O dear—O dear!" and Phoebe, disengaging herself from her mother's grasp, began to cry bitterly.

"It can't be, surely!" said Jane Fairly, after a pause; "he is too clever to let himself be hurt; and yet, accidents do come! Phoebe, darling, they'll bring him home, if so be he's hurt; so run at once, and ask the doctor to make haste hither. Go, child!"—a little sharply—"it never does no good to stand a-crying: do what you can to help."

And, following her own precept, Mrs. Fairly saw that the bed was ready, and put a kettle, which stood on the hob, on the fire; and then, and not till then, she walked rapidly towards the church to meet her husband. She had not gone far—not farther than the great elder-tree which hides the turn of the lane—when she saw a procession of men slowly approaching, bearing a temporary bier. She whispered hoarsely, as they approached her,—

"Is he dead?"

"No, he ain't, thank God!" was the blacksmith's reply; "but sadly hurt, I'm afraid!"

Then, taking courage, the poor wife moved to the side of the shutter on which they bore him, and gazed upon the deadly whiteness of her husband's face. He was unconscious; and as she looked on him, walking slowly beside him, the large tears fell fast and heavily from her eyes.

By the time they reached the carpenter's cottage, the surgeon, who, happily, lived near them, was there also, ready to give what aid he could.

It was a fearful accident. The full amount of injury could scarcely yet be ascertained. Both legs were broken, and the feet actually crushed. Instant amputation was necessary; and in the presence of Miller and Knight, who remained with their neighbour, it was effected. Fairly recovered his consciousness sufficiently to groan once or twice during the operation.

"He had better have been killed at once, doctor," said Miller, in a choked voice, when they found themselves in the parlour — "hadn't he?"

The doctor shook his head.

"A very sad case!" he said, "very—as bad as a railway accident. How he could have managed to save his head and the upper part of his body, I can't conceive. He must have clung on to something: his hands are chafed and bruised. Poor fellow! It was most shameful of the ringers not to ascertain that there was no one in the belfry before they began, especially as they found the door open."

"You see, sir, they thought the sexton had left it open o' purpose for them when the folks went out who had been a-decorating the church."

"They ought to have been sure," said the doctor, severely.

"If you please, sir," said a female neighbour, gently opening the door, "would you please to look at little Harry? He's a-goin' from one fit into another, and we can't do anything with him."

The doctor at once complied.

In the outer room, or kitchen, he found Harry. The boy was in a fainting fit, and looked as if he were dead. It was with difficulty that the surgeon's skill restored him; as soon as he could speak, he exclaimed,—

"My father!—Oh, sir! have I killed him?"

The doctor glanced inquiringly at the friendly neighbour.

"He was taking a pull at the bells with the young men," she whispered, in explanation.

The surgeon shuddered.

"No," he said, "your father is not dead; he is better. You must try to be more courageous, and not give extra trouble to your mother. Get him to bed as soon as you can," he added to the good woman, feeling the poor lad's fluttering pulse as he spoke; "I will send him an opiate. Thank God, the father is *not* killed!"

And the kind-hearted doctor took his leave, promising to look in at early day-dawn again.

That was a sad Christmas-day for all the village, since everybody more or less felt awed and shocked by the

dreadful accident which had befallen one whom they both liked and respected. The good neighbour dressed the roast-beef and plum-pudding prepared for the Christmas cheer, and coaxed the little family to sit down to dinner; but they could not eat, and poor Harry's sobs and choking tears, as his eyes rested on his father's vacant place, spread the infection of grief to all the rest, till even little Emma (as yet scarcely conscious of the reason of their grief) joined her small cry to their weeping. The strong-hearted mother was the first to recover her composure; she checked her young son's sorrow by telling him that the least sound would make his father worse; and Harry wiped his eyes, and struggled to be calm.

"But it is so dreadful, mother, to think that *I* helped to hurt him!"

"Nay, it was no fault of yours: you could not suppose poor father was there. Mrs. Manby is going to be so kind as to take you all home with her, and you must try and be a good boy, and not cry and fret. Please God, father may get well yet!"

"Oh, mother!" cried the boy, "do let me stay at home with you! I won't cry. I can't bear not to be nigh father!"

To this request the mother yielded, and the good neighbour departed with the younger children only, as a hushed house was most essential to the recovery of the sufferer.

Before Mrs. Fairly resumed her watch beside her husband, she gave Harry permission to sit in the parlour and look at the pictures in the Family Bible—a rare pleasure for the little ones—in which she hoped the poor boy would find comfort, and forget his trouble for a while.

The parlour at the carpenter's was not a very lively apartment when empty; it was neatly furnished: a good clock was fastened to the wall; there were some china chimney ornaments, while the best tea-tray, and the large picture Bible, flanked by two pink conch-shells of some size, stood on a side table. The fire was laid, but not lighted; and as the room was only used on grand occasions, it had a certain close, frowzy smell, by no means pleasant or refreshing; and as our senses undoubtedly act strongly upon our feelings, poor Harry was not much

cheered as he sat shivering, and turning over with blue fingers the huge pages of the folio Bible, gazing sadly down on the strange illustrations by which in Queen Anne's time—for such was the date of the edition—men strove to embellish the sacred Word of God.

But it *was* a treat—he had always been told so—and therefore he tried to think he liked it. But when he came to the book of Job, and beheld the patriarch seated in his affliction, with the Enemy visibly exulting over him, a feeling of horror and dismay came over him, and he wondered if the Evil Being were oppressing and trying *them* in the same way. Pale, and with a look of horror on his face, he sat looking fixedly before him, when the door gently opened, and Miss Ferrars, the Squire's daughter, walked into the room.

"Harry!" she exclaimed, startled by the boy's look—"my poor Harry! what is the matter? Is your father dead?"

"No, Miss Mary," he gasped, recovering himself—"no; but I was thinking——"

He could not express those troubled and perplexed thoughts.

Mary Ferrars walked to the table, and glanced at the book.

"What a terrible picture!" she said. "You had better not look at that, Harry, just now;" and she shut the volume, reverently.

"It is a sorrowful story, Miss Mary," said the boy, timidly—"Poor Job!"

"Yes—very sad; but, you see, his troubles were all allowed on purpose to make him better, Harry; and he was very patient and submissive to God, altogether, though he did murmur a little at first. But it is too difficult a book for you yet. Read the Gospels, or the Psalms, instead. How is your father?"

At the question poor Harry's lip quivered again, and he had great difficulty in replying,—

"Much the same; but he knows mother to-day."

"It was a great mercy that he was not killed!" said Miss Ferrars, looking at the brightest side—"a great mercy, Harry! You should be very thankful for it."

"But father will never be able to walk again," said the boy, "and he will be so unhappy! I know he will, for I should if I lost my feet, Miss Mary; and, oh! it was I who helped hurt him."

And the tears rolled down the boy's cheeks again.

"You did it without knowing it, Harry," said his young teacher: "it was an accident permitted by God, and therefore it *must* be for the best."

"For the best, Miss Mary?"

"Yes, Harry, although we cannot quite see how. You know we have two lives, and live for two worlds—our outer life is for this world, our inner life for the future and eternal one. Now, very often—as, indeed, must needs be the case, for reasons I cannot now explain to you—that which is good for the one life is bad for the other. Health, and strength, and worldly prosperity, are good for the life that is visible and passing hourly away; but pain, weakness, infirmity, and poverty, are good for the inner life, which will last for ever; and when God sends them, it is always that they—seeming evils as they are—may help us in growing stronger for the life which is *with Him* for ever. Do you understand, Harry?"

"Yes, Miss Mary, I think I do."

"Then, Harry, such is the case probably now. Your father suffers, that the outward cross may prove the inward gain."

"If you please, Miss Mary, will they pray for father in church?" asked the boy, his thoughts turning from the continual self-reproach which had been so hard to bear.

"Yes; Mr. Monckton did pray for him to-day with us all."

"He was here last night," said Harry, "but I didn't see him."

"I walked here with him now," said Miss Ferrars, "and he is at present with your mother. As I did not like to intrude on her just yet, I looked in here to find if any one was to be seen to whom I could give my basket. Will you take care of it for your mother till you go to her, Harry?" And Miss Ferrars placed a basket on the table.

"It is a little jelly and blanc-mange," she said, "for your father. He may be able to take some, perhaps, by

and by; and, Harry, do not fret any longer. God can make your father happier, even now he is maimed, than he was as a strong man. Take all our Heavenly Father sends you patiently; and try, hereafter, never willingly to cause your earthly parent pain."

Harry thanked her, and promised that he would try; and then she persuaded him to go into the kitchen and sit by the cheerful fire, and read a book she promised to send him, and departed—a ministering spirit indeed to the poor village boy.

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### CHAPTER III.

MARY Ferrars was the second daughter of the Squire of Fernlea. She was at this time only twenty years old; but the death of a beloved mother, and the constant illness of her elder sister, had made her grave and thoughtful beyond her age. She did much for her poorer neighbours; not in the shape of alms, for they were most of them able to earn a living, but by true friendly sympathy, unassuming counsel, and help in times of sickness or trial. She taught, also, in Mr. Monckton's schools, and thus Harry, who had been her Sunday pupil, had greatly profited by her training.

As she left the carpenter's house and proceeded up the village, she met Miller, looking very disconsolate. He touched his hat to her, and then paused as if he wished to speak.

"Well, Miller," she said, "a better account than we could have hoped of poor Fairly. It seems he has every chance of living; at least so the doctor thinks."

"I am heartily glad of it, ma'am, for he was a-resting on my mind."

"Were you one of the unfortunate ringers whose Christmas is thus spoiled?" she asked.

"No, ma'am, but I forespoke him; I said as he would be hammered, and it is come to pass."

"Hammered! What do you mean?"

Miller, in contrite tones, explained, by repeating what he had said to the blacksmith.

"Well, Miller," said Miss Ferrars, half-smiling, "I think it would have been kinder not to judge your neighbour; but I don't see why you should blame yourself for anything else; your prophecy could not fulfil itself."

"Then you don't think it unlucky to forespeak a man, Miss Mary?"

"I don't think 'unlucky' is a Christian word, Miller; and I am sure that your prophecy could not have influenced Fairly's destiny: but you had better talk the matter over with Mr. Monckton; he is your teacher, you know, on such matters."

"Yes, miss; but I can't so well always understand him. Thank you, ma'am, for telling me what you think."

And Miller walked on, still uncomfortable on the subject of his prophecy.

"A kind-hearted fellow!" said Mr. Monckton, when, in the course of the evening, Mary repeated the conversation to him: he always spent Christmas-day at the Hall. "A kind-hearted fellow! There are many self-conceited enough to have rejoiced at such a confirmation of their own sagacity, rather than to have regretted it. I am pleased with the sympathy of our little neighbourhood with their suffering comrade."

"Oh! the poor are always kind to each other," said Mary; "they do not dwell in charmed circles of exclusiveness as we do. You will see sometimes, in our class, a family live completely to themselves, isolated in interests and feeling as much as if they were in a desert—all revolving round their own orbits of selfishness. That cannot be right, Mr. Monckton?"

"No; assuredly. The neighbourly feeling of the poor or humbler rank is *far* better than the spirit of modern society, with which luxury and false pretension have much to do. Hospitality is enjoined, I believe, quite as much for our own sakes as for that of others; and it includes a great deal more than mere entertainment of guests."

"Poor Fairly!" said Mary, after a pause; "I wonder if he will ever be able to work at his trade again."



"I fear not; but something will be found for him, I dare say. He has his club, at present, I suppose."

"No," replied Miss Ferrars; "he would never belong to one. His wife told me so the other day; but he has laid by a little money. He was so confident in his strength that he thought it a pity to make the weekly payment. He believed it would be wasted."

"That is a great pity," said the Rector. "They are a worthy family. The boy is a promising lad already."

"Yes; poor Harry! He is so clever that it is a pleasure to teach him; and he has such a pleasant, gentle manner: he is like a gentleman's child."

"A good temper and kind heart refine the roughest," said Mr. Monckton; "and Harry has mental powers of no common order: only, don't spoil him."

George Fairly recovered; but his recovery was slow and painful. It was found that not only his lower limbs had suffered, but that some strain on the spine would probably lay him on his back for years, even if he ever recovered from it. It was a sad doom to be pronounced upon a man whose energy and skill were so strong, and whose independent spirit chafed at being a burden on others; and for a time George rebelled against it in his inmost heart; but he had a faithful guide and friend in his clergyman, with whom for the first time he was brought into close contact, and by degrees he took comfort, as another range of thought—how different from the old!—opened before him. But this change was as yet very imperfect—rather a shadow of the comfort that would come, perhaps, hereafter, than a reality. He still hoped that in time he might, though lame, be able to move about and work. The chief grief to him, amidst all his sufferings, was, that the family were now compelled to subsist upon that sum which his strict economy and over-work had laid by for Harry's education. Every penny spent upon himself was a sharp pain to bear.

Chief of the neighbours who were most untiring in their kindness—and all were kind to the poor carpenter—was the hunchback cobbler. He could never overcome a certain

feeling of remorse for having forespoken Fairly, as he called it; and he endeavoured to atone for it by every possible attention and assistance. George, who had known but little of him previously, and had rather despised the little man, as ignorant and full of old-world prejudices, could not but feel grateful to the constant attendant by his sick couch, who was so ready to help, and listen, and talk to him. The sympathy of the cobbler was no slight relief to him. How impossible, in his days of unbroken strength and health, would he have thought a friendship with the humble, untaught Miller, whose quaint sayings and opinions had appeared to him mere buffoonery. Now, almost unconsciously, he was opening his heart to him, as he never yet had done to mortal man.

"You see, Miller," he said, one evening, as the little man sat smoking by his couch, "it is really not so much for myself that I grieve as for poor Harry. I declare to you, every mouthful I swallow seems like a robbery of the lad, for that money was *his*, by my intention and gift."

"And yet," replied My Lord, "his mother and little sisters, to my mind, had as good a right to it. The boy can work for his bread as you did."

"If he were an ordinary lad, what you say would be just; but he is not; and, if I don't mind, he can't have even school teaching, but must take to work, to help us all when my savings are spent."

"Ay, sure, so he must, of course," said Miller.

"If I could but walk with wooden legs," continued the poor carpenter,—"my arms, thank God! are not injured—I could work again."

"But," said Miller, with the cruel candour of his class, "the doctor don't give a hope of it."

"He may be wrong," said Fairly, peevishly; "I do wish at times I could get to an hospital. They make wonderful cures at those places."

There was a short pause; My Lord smoked in silent thought. At length he broke it by saying,—

"And why don't you go then, George? The parson could get you put into the one in the town, if you wished it."

"But it's twenty miles and more off," said the poor

fellow, "and my good woman wouldn't like me to be so far away from her—to die, perhaps!"

"Why don't all of you move there? I tell you what, George, I've been a-thinking—Sunborough has more than an hospital in it; it's got likewise a free-school—an old grammar-school they call it—where boys of people dwellin' in the town are taught Latin and Greek, and all sorts of outlandish things, for nothin'; it having been all paid for long ago by some old gentleman, who was as fond of book-teaching as you are. If you lived there, Harry would never miss the money you are forced to spend, and you needn't grudge yourself everything as you do now. And I dare say he would learn as much there as if you sent him to the very best school near us."

"Are you sure that's all true, Miller?" asked the patient, eagerly.

"I should think so! I lived there with my old uncle all the time I was a boy; and many a time have they lads from the free-school hollered after me for my hump. Sure? of course I am."

"Then, Miller," said George, putting out his hand, and grasping that of his friend, "you've given me more comfort than I ever hoped to have again. My boy shall go there, whether they take me into the hospital or no. And I'll speak to Mr. Ferrars about moving there, when I see him."

From that moment George Fairly was haunted by the idea of Sunborough school and hospital. He proposed it to the Squire, and Mr. Ferrars was ready to forward any plan which promised to alleviate his poor tenant's sufferings; though it was the hospital, not the school, which induced him to second so warmly the carpenter's wishes.

In May, therefore, the Fairly family left their pleasant country home for the old county town. The father was forthwith installed in the hospital; the mother and her little ones in a lodging—such as befitted very humble means—near it.

After a time the patient was dismissed as incurable. His pain had been greatly relieved, but every hope of ever being able to move about without great agony was extinguished. They had done all that care, and skill, and benevolence *could* do. They provided him with a reclining

couch adapted to give him ease, and suffered him to remain an out-patient of the hospital, which assured him of occasional advice and medicine free of expense; and thus Fairly returned to his town-home.

The poor wife had obtained work as a needle-woman, and little Phœbe helped her a little: the large savings of the carpenter were not gone yet; and they saw winter approach without any great fear of suffering from want during its continuance. There was a little in the Savings Bank still, and Mrs. Fairly would not draw it out till the last moment. She mended their clothes again and again, and spared everything she could. Harry was making steady progress at school, and fighting his way by dint of hard work through all the disadvantages of poverty and shabbiness.

This was George's chief comfort in the gloomy dwelling to which he was confined, with no companion save his wife, who sat working hour after hour by his side, while his little girls, who were fast losing their country bloom, played about the close, small sitting-room. How they all yearned for the green lanes and fresh breezes of the dear old village — for the kind old neighbours of former days!

Little Phœbe kept a sort of mental register of all that marked each season there, as the months passed on: now the hay was making in Farmer Salter's Fields; now it was harvest time; now Master Knight's forge was burning brightly, as it did the night "poor father" was hurt. But *they* had nowhere to play but a back-yard where the sun never came!

It was after such an innocent lament to Harry that the boy bethought himself of trying to get some toys to make up for their out-door amusements. He carved from scraps of wood, begged from a carpenter's shop, a number of pretty things, which enchanted his young sisters and amused his father. This simple kindness suggested to the carpenter a means of work even yet within his power, and he eagerly desired his boy to buy him some wood, and heat his glue-pot next day: he would make toys for children.

This was so pleasant a resource that the broken-spirited man awoke to fresh life and hopefulness at it: his taste and ingenuity were exercised—his time employed. The

long hours no longer seemed endless, till Harry should return from school to cheer him by the one event of the day. The little girls could help also, in many ways, and Harry's skill in carving, thus suddenly developed, was also called in whenever he had leisure from his studies. The toy-shop purchased the first two or three of these toys.

It was just at this time that Miss Ferrars drove over to see them, and bid them farewell, before her father and herself took their invalid to Italy, where she was to pass the early spring. She was delighted to find Fairly so much more cheerful, but she looked with pitying eyes on the pale wife and drooping children.

"You miss the country air, Mrs. Fairly," she said, kindly, "I am afraid."

"Well, yes, ma'am; you see I was never used to a town, nor the children either."

"And could you not return to the village now? The hospital has done all it can; and I think very likely, when I go to London, I may be able to get your husband's new powers of toy-making full employment. I will call at the great toy-shops and ask them. You must let me have a specimen or two, Fairly; and you could send them up as easily from Fernlea as from Sunborough."

"You are very kind, miss," said the carpenter, answering for his wife; "but there's the boy . . . He couldn't be kept at the school if I did not live in the town."

"But he could go to the village school."

"It is not the same thing, ma'am, asking your pardon; and I am sure his mother will agree with me, that it would be wrong to give it up. But if you would be so kind as to speak to the toy-shop keepers, it would be a great help, for the sale here can be but small."

"Well, I will do that, I promise you. I wish I could have left you in Fernlea; but if that cannot be, I must hope you will do well here. Say good-bye for me to my little pupil Harry; and tell him he cannot do enough for such good parents."

And Miss Ferrars bade them a kind farewell. Soon afterwards the Squire's family left England; but not before a London order for toys had reached George Fairly.

## CHAPTER IV.

THUS two years passed away. The money in the Savings Bank was gone; the poor family relied on their own labour for daily bread. And it was a hard struggle. Toys are not an essential of human life; at least George Fairly had no reason to think so, judging by their sale at Sunborough; and the continued residence of the Ferrars abroad caused him to be gradually forgotten by the London dealers. They had as skilful and cheaper workmen nearer at hand. Once only during that long interval did the kind-hearted cobbler manage to visit his friends. By that time they had moved upwards in the same house to the garrets, though they still afforded themselves two rooms, and retained the greater portion of their furniture.

Miller was much shocked at the change from the neat village home and from the well-to-do air of the family.

"Why, George," he said, as he took the chair by the side of his couch, and tried to be cheerful under difficulties, "you have gone up in the world since I saw you."

"Yes," said the carpenter, with a faint smile, "I'm afraid you've had a good many steps to mount, Miller. But there's more air up here, after all; and it costs less, you know."

"Ay, of course. And the lad—how gets on the lad?"

He had divined the *one* bright spot in that dreary life. The father's countenance brightened.

"Capital! Miller. He wins prizes every half. Wife, show Miller Harry's books."

And the mother, dusting them proudly with her apron, took from the window-shelf four handsome volumes. A Shakespeare, a Milton, and two Latin books, the names of which the cobbler could not quite make out.

"That's brave!" he cried. "Well, it is pleasant to find that your efforts have not been thrown away. Though I can't but wish the lad were able to help keep house now. He's fourteen, ain't he, Mrs. Fairly?"

"Last 13th of November," said the mother; "and a tall, fine lad he is, I can tell you, Master Miller. It's hard work I have to keep his clothes fitting him, and he's obliged always to be neat, you know, because (as his Master once said, when his boots were worn out) a Free Grammar School ain't a Ragged School."

And the poor wife sighed, as she remembered how she had toiled all night, and finally sold a piece of furniture to buy him some new ones.

"It must be a hard trial, indeed!" said Miller, sympathisingly; "if I had but his measure, I should be glad to work for you, and make him a pair cheap, Mrs. Fairly—say for the cost of the leather? and that's not dear."

The mother returned warm thanks for this kind offer. Her boy, she hoped, would be at home before Miller left, and he could take the measure.

"And, perhaps," said the cobbler, "I may get the length of his foot in the other sense—who knows, Mrs. Fairly?"

And they all laughed at My Lord's joke. Then the friends got into a long chat about village matters; and Mrs. Fairly listened with great interest to an account of Bessy Thurle's return from a London place,—how she had not been able to get between the free seats for width of crinoline, and had shocked the neighbours by a porkpie hat.

"Mr. Monckton didn't know her, I promise you," said the cobbler, "she looked so like a large barrel, with a little barrel at the top of it. I said that it took a good deal o' time to 'get round' a lassie now-a-days."

"Did ever any one hear of the like?" cried Mrs. Fairly; "but it's nearly as bad here, if not quite. The dirtiest rags are spread over a hoop, I can assure you. And the Knights, how are they?"

"Very well. Jessy Knight is growing a pretty little lassie,—very handy and tidy."

"And there ain't any hope of Mr. Ferrars coming back?"

"Not that I hear of. Miss Ferrars is too ill, they say; I am afraid she will never come home again."

Harry's step was heard now upon the stairs; in a few moments he was greeting his old friend, and then, at his father's eager bidding, he described his school, and its requirements.

"Well, Harry," said Miller, as he paused, "it do seem you get a deal of Latin and Greek, and what do you call—matheymatics—but what's to come of it all? What are you going to be, my man?"

Harry stared; absorbed in his books, and greedy of knowledge for its own sake, the boy had gone on with his studies without much thought of what they were to lead to.

"Harry," said his father, "will be a learned man, I hope. Perhaps he'll keep a school, like his master, or be a great lawyer, or a bishop, some day, who knows?"

The cobbler shook his head.

"Well, there's no saying," was his evasive reply, "but it costs you and his mother a deal beforehand; and isn't so certain in the end, as I can see. Make haste about it, Harry, my lad," he added, "before it's too late."

The last few words were uttered in a low tone, with a significant glance at the mother, who was, indeed, sadly thin and pale.

"You see, lad, they fine books won't fill a hungry stomach."

This hint was given as he kneeled down to measure Harry for a pair of shoes, and it did not fall on heedless ears, though they were for the first time opened to the truth they conveyed. Like many of our earthly idols, Harry had grown, from long habit, quite unconscious of the sacrifices offered to him.

Suddenly he felt what the cobbler wished, in fact, to teach him, that he owed duties to others as well as to himself—that self-culture was not the only purpose of life.

"I'll set about it at once, Master Miller," he answered, in a low tone.

And Miller felt that *his* work in the family was achieved.

About a week after this visit the carrier brought a hamper from Fernlea. It contained the promised boots, of which the cobbler (in a letter which had cost him more trouble than the offering itself) begged Harry's acceptance, with a characteristic hope that "he would not let grass grow under them;" a ham from Mrs. Knight; tea, sugar, and printed calico for the children's dresses from Mrs. Monckton; and five shillings from the Rector.



If the donors could have seen the pleasure the unpacking of that hamper gave, they would have been well repaid.

But the stream of time, thus pleasantly broken for a moment, soon resumed its usual slow and dreary current. Harry, revolving many plans, still trudged in Miller's shoes to school, and forgot the said plans over his books. Still the carpenter made boxes and carts, of a plainer and cheaper sort. Still the poor mother worked at her ill-paid needle.

The winter closed in—severe, pitiless. People warmly clad, and with plenty of food, rejoiced at it, as “bracing” and “seasonable.” Alas! in its frozen waters, its snow-covered earth, its icy breezes, the poor saw the cold hand of Death. There was no work to be had. No, not even for the maker of toys, for all trades suffered in a degree; and even if the said toys had found purchasers, the poor carpenter could not have supplied them. He was very ill. The badly-warmed garret had not sufficiently protected him from the intense cold, and the shattered frame was now the victim of rheumatic pains, which deprived him of the use of his arms and hands. The mother toiled harder and harder, and *her* work did not fail utterly; but it was very little, and the worse paid, because now more hands were in the market. She sold, bit by bit, all the furniture they could spare. Only Harry's grandly bound books lay still in the window-sill. And he tramped daily to school, and thought of what he should do. What *could he* (the lad who could now read Homer for his own pleasure, and enjoy a hard mathematical problem—who could forget hunger and want over the pages of his Shakespeare) what could he do?

The lad was sorely puzzled, but dreamed on. The holidays came, and Harry once more received a prize—this time a writing-desk. Poor lad! the master little knew how gladly he would have received a loaf of bread instead, for that day, before he left home, he had given to his little sisters the contents of the basket his mother had prepared for him, and was thus entirely without food all day. But, in so very large a school, it was impossible for the master to know the circumstances of all his pupils; and though Harry was shabby, the devotion of his parents had hitherto kept him from showing signs of absolute want.

It was a sore temptation to him, as he walked home with his desk, to sell it or pawn it—precious as it was to him—for food; but he remembered the delight with which his father would look at it, and refrained, and resolutely bore it home.

Alas! a brief look, a single ejaculation of—"You're a good lad, Harry!" was all the notice his father took of it. He was groaning with pain. His mother, seated at her shirt-making, could scarcely spare a glance. His little sisters cowered shivering over the few embers in the grate; but, when he joined them, Phœbe was pleased with it, and examined it carefully.

"I wish it was mine!" she said, softly.

"Greedy Phœbe!" said little Emma, "you should not wish for brother's things."

"But I would sell it, and buy something for father."

"And so will I, Phœbe," said the boy, rising; "I will go at once."

And taking his desk up, with a very regretful feeling—for a boy does prize his first writing-desk!—Harry stole down stairs and away to the pawnbroker's.

"The gold balls of Lombardy!" thought the boy, learned already in history and its poetic symbols and its old lore; "well, I hope it is the last time they will be *my* banner!" And he entered, laden with his prize. He could get but a few shillings for his deposit—but they were a great boon then; and he paused to think how he would spend them. Wine was most needful to his father. He would buy a little at the nearest inn; or, better still (because to be bought in a cheaper quantity), he would get a little brandy; so he hastened to the nearest public-house and made his purchase. From thence he went to a baker's and bought a loaf; to a grocer's for an ounce of tea; and then, with his purchases, returned to his lowly home.

The thankfulness of his mother, the relief the spirits and water gave his father (whose neuralgic pains were partly caused by want of nourishment), were worth to the poor son double the praises of his schoolmaster, or the pleasure of possessing a well-filled writing-desk. His little sisters enjoyed the bread, too, as if it had been

cake; and Harry thought he had never tasted any so good before.

"What can I do to help them all?" was his thought on awaking on the morrow. "Surely some work may be found for me, even now." And as soon as he was dressed he went into the streets in search of some employment. A young woman was just opening a street-door of a large shop.

"Oh, dear, dear!" he heard her exclaim, "what a heap of snow! who is to walk through it, I wonder?"

"I'll sweep it away for you, if you will lend me a broom," said Harry.

"That I will, and thank you," was the rejoinder, and she quickly returned with the implement he required.

Harry found sweeping away the snow pleasant exercise, and with a glowing face called the girl to receive her broom back.

"How much would such a broom cost?" he asked her, as she thanked him.

She told him.

"Thank you; where can I buy one?"

"Why, what can the boy want of a broom?" cried the damsel, laughing, "are you going to turn road-sweeper for fun?"

"No, for profit, if I can turn a penny by it," was the reply; "so tell me where I can get a broom."

The girl complied, but with an air of doubt, as if she still fancied he was joking with her.

"I am in earnest, I assure you," said Harry: "we are *very* poor, though my dress is decent. I should be thankful to sweep or do any work."

"Well, now, to think of that!" cried the girl. "Why, I thought I had often seen you going to school with your books under your arm."

"So you have; but *now* I must work for my bread—good-bye!"

"Stay," said Susan Grey, kindly, "you are a good lad to be so ready to work. I will lend you my broom, but you must bring it back to-night by six o'clock; and I will tell master about you, and see if he can give you a job."

"Thank you very much," said Harry; "I will be sure to return it to you."

And, armed with his broom, he proceeded to sweep the snow from the doorways. To ensure some payment for his labour, he knocked at the doors first, and offered his services. As he did so, chiefly at houses where the approach to the door was through a tiny garden, or by a stone path, his offer was generally accepted, and twopence, a penny, and even in one instance a silver threepenny piece, rewarded his labour.

As he was thus occupied at one doorway a schoolfellow called to him from the street,—

"Hallo, Harry! making snow-balls?"

"No, earning my breakfast," he replied, merrily.

The other laughed and passed on, by no means understanding the painful "in earnest" of the supposed joke.

How far poor Harry went on his labour of snow-sweeping it would be hard to say. He did not spare himself. At midday, a roll from a baker's satisfied his hunger, and then he resumed his toil. It kept him warm; it kept him cheerful. His thoughts were free to range where they would, and the hope of bringing some help (little though it might be) to his dear ones at home made him buoyant and happy. When the clear, cold evening, and the striking of five o'clock, warned him to retrace his steps to the house of the kind maiden who had lent him his broom, he took out and counted his pence. He had earned two shillings! The sum seemed an immense one, and Harry threw his broom into the air and gave a cheer that echoed in the frosty air, and quite startled an old potato-seller who was warming his fingers over his stove near him.

"Heyday, youngster! what's the matter wi' ye?" he asked.

"Oh, my good father," said Harry, delighted to be able to speak of his success, "see what I have made to-day by my broom!"

"Ay, ay," replied the itinerant merchant, "there's a deal to be got by street-sweepin'. Be ye doin' it for a lark, though?"

"Lark, no! real, downright earnest."

"Well, then, all I can say is, a lad like you ought to find a better trade. Buy a potato?"

"Just one I will have," said the boy. "How good they smell!"

And he eagerly devoured the savoury vegetable, taken hot from its oven. Never before nor afterwards, Harry often declared, had he tasted anything which appeared to him so delicious.

"I've good hot coffee for sale, too," continued the stove-man.

But Harry could not afford himself another luxury; he must hasten on, that he might be true to his tryst with Susan, and, so punctual did he manage to be, that as he knocked at her door the near church clock struck six.

"You good lad!" cried the damsel, as he returned the broom and his thanks; "but you couldn't have wanted it all day, did you?"

"Yes, I did. You see, it has constantly snowed at intervals, and people were everywhere glad of my help. It's my opinion, that they couldn't have done without me!"

"Well, I never!" said Susan, "you *do* keep a light heart. I can't believe it's all true you told me; but I hope so; for as soon as master come home I told him all about you. He said, he dared say you was some youngster out on a lark, and that I should never see my broom no more. But he bade me, if you *did* come, to show you in to him; so walk in, please."

Wondering a little at this invitation, Harry complied, and was ushered by the maid into a very comfortable parlour, in which a bald-headed, respectable-looking man was sitting, drinking his wine after dinner.

"Here's the broom-boy, sir," was his introduction, which nearly made him smile, but he restrained the inclination, and bowed respectfully.

"So!" said the master of the house, "so, you are the lad who has imposed himself as a street-sweeper on Susan, and *not* stolen her broom. You are a merry fellow!"

"I have rather cause to be sad, sir," replied poor Harry; "all I told her was true; I sought work in earnest for my nearly starving family."

"Ay, did you? And could you find nothing to do but that? Your trade will end with the first sunshine. Sit down, lad, and tell me how it happens that one like you can be brought so low as that?"

Harry obeyed, and told in few words the tale of his father's misfortunes and struggles.

The old gentleman listened attentively, and once or twice took out his handkerchief and used it.

"It's a sad story, indeed!" he said, when Harry paused,—"very sad, but it sounds like a fairy tale. Your father must be a strange fellow, a very strange fellow! and his destiny is as strange. Crippled by Christmas bells! I never heard of such a thing: and yet it might be . . . Well, my lad, leave me your address, and I will call on your parents to-morrow, and if I find all correct, why, I will try to give you better work than snow-sweeping. I like a boy who will *make* work rather than beg.

"Good evening!" said his host, "I will call to-morrow; or, stay, as it will be Christmas day, the day after."

Harry, after a cheerful, kind word to his first friend, Susan, then hurried home. He found his father and mother both very anxious for him, but, placing a little coffee, some bread and eggs, which he had bought, in his mother's hands, he bade her get "tea," and he would relate his adventures.

"And, mother, if a shilling more will get a brighter fire, my story will sound all the better."

"Harry," said his father, in a low, hoarse voice, "you have not surely been begging?"

"No, father, I earned every penny honestly. Oh! I have been a public blessing, you'll find! It's quite a fairy tale, Emmy."

"Oh, is it, Hally," cried the little sister, jumping round him, "and will you tell it to us?"

"Yes, when there is a big blaze, and the coffee is hot for father."

"Oh!" in prolonged delight, "shall we have a blaze?—and coffee too! How nice!"

And Emma climbed upon her father's bed, and nestled down beside him in delighted anticipation. Harry's shilling sufficed to kindle the promised blaze, fuel being easily obtained from the landlady, and the little family gathered

round it. "Father's" bed was always by the hearth-side; the mother sat at a table opposite, and made and poured out the coffee, the delicious fragrance of which alone was refreshing, and Harry, extended before the fire, on the ground, a sister on each side of him, revelled in the pleasure of their hard-won comforts.

Tea was a serious meal with the hungry family, and talking during its performance was not to be thought of; but when they had quite finished it, and "mother" had removed the tea-things, and Phœbe had washed them up and placed them in the cupboard, Harry began his adventures, and made them so very pleasant and wonderful, that even his father laughed.

Susan, in his tale, became attendant spirit on a great enchanter; the broom, a fairy; the snow, evil spells; the potato-man, a great cook on his travels; and thus a pleasant fairy tale was made out of the doings of the day. The little girls were delighted. Phœbe entered into the fun of the fiction, but Emma took it in serious earnest, and was a little frightened at the "enchanter's" promised visit.

"But the broom was a nice, dear fairy," she said—"much better than Bluebeard's key. What was her real name besides 'Broom,' Hally?"

"Honest Labour," said her father, in a tone of deep feeling; "the best of fairies, Emmy, in kind hands. In other hands, it was just a common broom."

"God bless you, my lad!" he added that night, when his son kissed him before going to rest, "you have swept more than snow away to-day. Good night, my son!"

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## CHAPTER V.

THERE should be no sad hearts on the day which gave the world a Saviour. Such is the meaning of the significant charities, and gifts, and home-joys of Christmas. But, alas! that very ordinance of Providence, "The poor shall never perish out of the land," renders the beautiful theory too often vain. Christmas was a sad day this year

to George Fairly. Poverty pressed sorely on him. The future was dark and hopeless, and pain laid its hand even more heavily than usual on him.

His wife had taken the children, by his request, to afternoon service, and he was alone. The fire, raked carefully together, was small and feeble; the clouds, charged with snow, were all he could see from his garret-window. His wife had laid the Prayer-book and a Bible beside him, but he could not read. He lay listening to the whistling of the wind and thinking of the past—that past which had been so full of hope and confidence! He remembered his fond ambition for his boy; his ceaseless toil; his pride in being a skilful and successful workman; and the contrast to the present wrung a groan from him. The future was as gloomy as the sky on which he listlessly gazed.

A rap at the door interrupted his reverie. He thought it was the landlady's little girl come to look to the fire, as his wife had requested, and he bade her "come in." The permission was answered by a tall, stout, young man, whose dress showed that he was a clergyman. Startled at the sudden apparition, George made a slight effort to raise himself on his couch.

"Don't disturb yourself, pray," said the stranger, in a cheering, kindly voice, and with the pleasantest of smiles; "I am only come to wish you a happy Christmas, since you cannot come to church, I hear."

"Thank you, I am sure, sir," replied Fairly; "it's uncommon kind of you."

He felt the presence of the stranger at that moment almost as welcome as that of an angel.

"Your name, I hear, is George Fairly; mine is Robert Vyvyan: and I think, Fairly, that I must just say, I should have been happy to make your acquaintance earlier. Why did not you, as an invalid, struggling with many difficulties, send for your clergyman?"

This was said in a tone of friendly and kind remonstrance.

"Well, sir, you see, I an't been used to ask charity," said George, hesitatingly.

"My good fellow," answered Mr. Vyvyan, with a slight, pleasant laugh, "don't speak as if you took me for a



relieving officer! I like to know *all* my flock, because then, if they require sympathy or advice, or a cheering friendly word now and then, I am ready to give it. Besides"—more gravely—"those who can't go to church may be glad of priestly ministrations at home."

"You are very good, sir; but I can't say as I thought about that: and if I had, I couldn't have taken the liberty. We were strangers here; and it wasn't like sending to one's own parson at home, like; it was a thing I couldn't ha' done."

"Well, then, I am glad I heard of you from our churchwarden to-day. He told me such a pleasant little story of a boy of yours, that I made up my mind to wish you a happy Christmas, and ask you a little about him."

"The gentleman who was so kind to Harry, sir?" Then he added, with a sudden flush of pride, "My poor lad never did such a thing before. He's a Greek and Latin scholar, sir."

"Indeed! But it was no demeaning of his Greek and Latin, my good fellow, that he swept the snow away with so good and filial a purpose. One of our great divines has said, that 'if it were God's will that he should do it, an archangel would not disdain to sweep a causeway.' Nothing is really mean or little that is in the way of duty."

"So my poor lad felt," said the carpenter; "he was as merry over it as if he had been a king—making it all into a fairy tale, like, afterwards. He *did* do away with some hard thoughts of mine as I listened to him: but to-day they are come back again."

"Because you are alone and rather chilly. This cold climate of ours affects us in mind as well as body. I will just order a little more fire, with your permission; I am rather cold myself."

And Mr. Vyvyan left the room, and soon returned with a huge log of wood in his arms, and the girl of the house following with a shovelful of coals.

"There," he said, as he made up a cheerful blaze, "I coaxed that yule log out of your good landlady, with whom I'm a favourite, I flatter myself. Now we shall be warm and comfortable, and able to chat. Will you tell me how you came to be so sadly injured?"

George complied, beginning, however, before the fatal Christmas Eve, and letting his sympathising listener into all the hopes and strivings of that past which had been so painfully present to him half an hour before. And Mr. Vyvyan, warming his hands over the blaze, listened with interest and attention.

"A sad story, indeed, Fairly!" he said; "but it was God's will, and doubtless for a good end. A sharp discipline, but, perhaps, needed; and which has borne fruit already. Ay, it has! Why, my dear fellow, without it, you and your wife could not have shown such heroic, self-sacrificing devotion to your boy's interests. Do you think giving up the sweet, pleasant country, and the kindness of your old neighbours, and the certain help of your own parson, toiling on alone in a great town, and spending your savings in half the time they would have lasted at Fernlea, all for Harry's sake, have not made you a better man? Not that I think you were quite wise in a worldly sense about Harry. But education is such a great hobby of mine, that I give you my full sympathy."

"You are very good, sir," said poor Fairly; "and I dare say it is all for the best; but, at times, it is hard to feel that it is."

"Doubtless, very, very hard, indeed!" said Mr. Vyvyan, kindly: "those who do not suffer cannot tell how hard; but there is comfort in thinking that to ONE it is fully known."

And then, gradually passing from his character of friendly sympathiser to the higher office of his profession, Mr. Vyvyan offered the lofty consolations of religion to his parishioner. With George's assent, he then read and prayed with him. The book was scarcely closed when steps on the stairs were heard, announcing the return of the family from church. Mr. Vyvyan rose to go.

"There is a pretty poem of the American poet, Longfellow, called 'Excelsior,'" he said, "though, alas! it is a favourite song with young ladies. Some day I will read it to you, Fairly. Now, *you* have been striving *upwards*, but it has not been to the *highest summit* of all. There is a better 'Excelsior' for you and Harry than that of knowledge or distinction. May you gain it!"

Mrs. Fairly and her children entered the room at this moment. He spoke to them kindly; and saying he was to preach in the evening, and had not any more time to spare, took his departure. He had left comfort and hope behind him.

The next day brought Harry's friend, the churchwarden, who was a stationer and printer in Sunborough. He had received from Mr. Vyvyan so good an account of the poor Fairlys, that he had quite made up his mind to help the lad who had so taken his fancy.

He proposed to George to take Harry into his shop as an assistant shopman.

"His schooling won't be thrown away in the place," he said; "he will have a good deal to do with books, you see," and he laughed at his own jest; "and, by and by, he may be of use in the printing-office; not that we do much there but in the way of bills and catalogues, and now and then a sermon. Still, a stationer and printer wants a lad who knows more than his Horn-book, as my father used to say."

"You are very good, sir," said George; "and we ought to be thankful;" but the bitterness of a darling project disappointed was at his heart. "What do you say, my lad?"—to Harry.

"I should like to take the place very much, father, if Mr. Dodd pleases," he replied: "I would take any work to help you and mother. And this is a great deal better than I could have expected."

"Your wages will be seven shillings a-week and your board," said Mr. Dodd: "that is not so much as I have paid my late shopboy,—an idle fellow, above his business!—but I shall raise them when you know your work."

It was settled that Harry should enter on his new duties the next week. As Mr. Dodd was leaving the room, he paused, and said in a low tone to Harry,—

"The snow's thawing, my lad! Would you like me to advance your first week's wages?"

"Oh, sir, you are too kind!" cried Harry.

"Not at all: I can trust you for the full worth of them."

And the good stationer placed seven shillings in Harry's hand.

That evening, also, Mr. Vyvyan's housekeeper brought

a jug of capital soup "for the invalid," and a plum-pudding and piece of beef for the children and their mother. Another time George would have felt pained at receiving "relief," as he called it; but the clergyman's manner, and the fact that he had not offered money during his visit, gave these welcome gifts the air of a friendly Christmas present, and he could smile and enjoy them with his children. Harry was wild with delight at the idea of earning money for them all.

"And I need not give up my studies, father, for it," he said; "I shall have time to read, I dare say, between customers and at night. I won't lose all you have suffered so much to win for me."

"You must do your duty to your employer first, my lad," said George; "your time will be his now, remember; but I'm glad to think that there'll be plenty of books, too!"

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## CHAPTER VI.

MR. DODD'S shop, which was beside the private entrance where Harry had made acquaintance with Susan, was one of the best in the town; and Harry found he was to be only one of three assistants: the two already employed in it were much older than he was. Edward Lewis, the head shopman, was more than twenty; he was a grave, quiet young man, who did his best to dress like a clergyman, to the great annoyance and scandal of the worthy stationer, who was continually on the watch to check the presumptuous toilet of his foreman, but who could not, for this one weakness, dispense with his valuable services. This individual was disposed to be very civil to Harry, as having been a public schoolboy. His comrade in the shop was a youth of eighteen, who laboured under the impression that he had a genius for the stage, and was fond of novel-reading: he, also, received his new companion with civility, and was ready to show him what to do, and to help him in all early difficulties. Harry's passion for reading

made the peculiar smell of new books very pleasant to him, and he glanced round the well-filled shelves, gay with the many brilliant colours of their binding, with delight. But a very short time made him feel much in the position of Tantalus: it was not a lending library, and Harry dared not use or cut the leaves of the tempting volumes round him, in any of the intervals of leisure which occurred during the day. So, to turn off the sort of longing he began to feel for them, he entered into conversation with Frederick Jones, the younger shopman.

"Do we all dine together?" he asked.

"Yes—that is, two at a time; one is always left in the shop. As you are the youngest, I suppose it will be you now who will stay: you'll dine when we have finished. You won't mind it?"

"I should think not," said Harry, laughing; "but I wish I could get a book that I might look at when there's nothing to do."

"I will lend you one," replied Jones: "I subscribe; but" (mysteriously) "you must not let the governor see it, or he'll be down on you! He hates to see a library-book about, even when there's not a soul in the shop."

"Then, thank you, I would rather not have it," said Harry, frankly; "I should feel sly, and it's snobbish to be sly."

"Please yourself, pray!" answered Jones, with an offended air; "I don't consider that I'm sly, when I'm improving my mind in spite of prejudice."

And, withdrawing to the back of the shop, he drew a very dirty-looking shilling novel from his pocket, and was soon completely absorbed in it. Harry tried to find employment in dusting and arranging the books and other articles of sale on the counter, and found enough to do till a customer entered, when he was ready to assist Lewis in finding the required articles, and patiently enduring the fancies of the young-lady purchaser.

Just before dinner, Mr. Dodd himself made his appearance in the shop.

"Well, how are we getting on?" he asked, in a low tone, of Lewis, glancing at Harry—"useful? eh?"

"Very, sir, I think: an attentive, busy lad."

"Ay, I thought so. Well, Harry, do your best, my boy, and you will get on nicely!"

And he passed on to his office, which was behind the shop.

"Is there a Mrs. Dodd?" asked Harry of the grave shopman.

"No, Mr. Dodd is a bachelor; but he has an orphan nephew and niece, whom he has adopted, and looks on as his children. They are just come home from school. Mr. Dodd is very fond of Miss Kate. Master Tom is a wild youth, rather, I should say; he tears through the shop sometimes in a most riotous manner, and is very rude in his ways."

No incident marked the remainder of Harry's day as shopman; and it was with a light heart that, when the shop closed, he ran homewards.

"Well, my dear boy!" said poor George, his whole countenance brightening into animation at the sight of the beloved son—"well, how have you got on?"

"Very well, father," replied the boy, taking his accustomed place beside the couch.

"All among books still—eh?"

"Yes, all among books," echoed Harry.

"A'most as good as school, I should say," observed the carpenter, contentedly; "it would ha' broke my heart, Harry lad, if you had been obliged to give the books up, and go to a hardware or iron shop, or such-like."

Harry was silent; he would not for the world have undeceived his father as to the educational benefits of the stationer's shop; but in the very spirit of the feeling expressed he at once took his books, and seated himself again by Fairly's side to study alone.

"Don't over-do it, lad," said his father, laying his hand tenderly on the boy's fair hair—"don't over-do it: you must be tired!"

"Only a little of standing," said Harry. "When I have construed this bit, shall I read to you, father?"

"If you please, lad; but I don't think we'll have Shakespeare to-night. You shall read a chapter to me, as if it were Sunday. The Lord has been very good to us, and we didn't ought to be ungrateful."

And, instead of reading from his beloved prize, as was

his wont on grand occasions, Harry, when his self-appointed task was done, spread the Family Bible on the table, and read aloud one of his favourite chapters from the Book of Kings — that wonderful story of Elijah, which captivated his boyish fancy. The carpenter listened attentively, and said, when he ended, —

“We’ll have a chapter every night, lad!”

While Harry was busy in the shop the next day, a little girl and boy entered it from the street, and, approaching the counter, the former said, —

“If you please, Uncle Dodd says you’re to give me a ‘Peter Parley.’”

“And I’m to have a ‘Robinson Crusoe,’” cried the boy; “they are his prizes he gives us.”

“Yes, miss,” said Harry, hastening to seek the books. As he did so, the two children looked at him attentively.

“Are you the boy that swept up snow with Susan’s broom?” asked the boy, as he received the volume.

“Yes, sir.”

“Then I think you were a great stupid! — *I’d* have made snow-balls.”

“For shame, Tom!” said his little black-eyed sister: “uncle says he was a very good boy, and he wishes you were like him!”

Tom made a grimace.

“I won’t be like him — so there!” he replied; “and I can’t bear him!”

Having given this utterance to his feelings, he rushed out of the shop, nearly knocking over the grave Lewis in his progress. His sister lingered.

“Never mind what he says, boy,” she said, apologetically: “he doesn’t mean it — Tom doesn’t. Uncle says you have some little sisters; do they like cake?”

“Yes, miss.”

“Then I will give you some to take to them, and a piece for yourself.”

And with this promise little Miss Katie tripped away, but she kept her promise faithfully.

“Fairly,” said Mr. Dodd, that evening, as the shop was about to close, “I should be glad if you would bring your little sister to play with Katie to-morrow. It’s dull for Katie,

poor child! alone, for there's no keeping Tom in-doors; and she's about Katie's size. As, perhaps, your mother may not have a clean frock ready, Susan says she will send her one of Katie's old ones."

Harry thanked his employer warmly; and from that time, or at least so long as Katie's holidays lasted, Plæbe Fairly was constantly her playfellow. And the good-natured Susan, by her master's instructions, often sent home by the hands of the little girl a little broth or some strengthening food for the carpenter.

Harry strove by diligent attention to repay this kindness. He became an active and useful hand in the shop. The evenings were spent in diligent study, in which he was encouraged and sustained by the loving praises and simple admiration of his father.

There was something touching in the way in which George Fairly revived, as it were, at his son's return from his day's work, and in the entire satisfaction with which he watched the lad over his books. What greater spur could be given to the affectionate boy's efforts than that loving eye ever resting on him? And then, when he had conquered a difficulty, Harry was so sure of his exultation being shared by his father, even though the difficulty and the conquest were but ill understood in themselves.

When the bright Midsummer came, Miller once more visited them, and the cobbler's delight at finding Harry absolutely of use to his family was intense. The worthy fellow had made shoes for all the family, and, proud of the grateful applause his work received, slapped Harry on the back, saying,—

"That's it, old chap! You know the saying, 'Nothin' like leather!' Now, do you know what I've been a-thinkin', Harry? You and I, betwixt us, is strong enough, I should say, to carry father down-stairs—eh? Well, I thought so! Now, I have a-saved up all the winter for a chay—yes, Mrs. Fairly, for a chay!—and I intends to take father for a ride a bit into the country. There's a very pretty tea-garden just outside the town, and we'll go there to-morrow."

The carpenter made some feeble objection to the expense it would be to the cobbler, but My Lord would hear of



no refusal; and it was evident, from the sigh of pleasure with which poor Fairly assented, that he would have regretted his own success.

We doubt if it would be possible to convey to the minds of the strong and healthy the delight with which the long-confined sufferer inhaled the fresh air. The drive itself was full of pleasures to him: the shops, the people, the busy moving life, the hum, and the sunshine, were all so many excitements and novelties after that still garret and its view of the clouds and house-roofs. But when they were fairly beyond the town, and between the green fields, he could have shed tears of delight.

"Mother!" he cried, laying his hand on his wife's—"there's a butterfly! Look! what a splendid fellow! And, oh dear, how good the hay smells!"

"How I should like to help make it!" cried little Emma, jumping on the cobbler's knee.

"Sit still, little one, for fear of shaking father!" said My Lord, whose countenance was quite radiant; "you shall run about by and by."

And so the children did when they reached the tea-gardens, to which were attached a labyrinth and a bowling-green, which, as the day was not a holiday, were deserted, and free to admit their sportive and happy guests.

The cobbler and Harry, then, aided by the waiter and the driver, managed to lift out the carpenter and lay him gently on the smooth grass-terrace above the green, where he could see the young ones run, and watch the insects, and listen to the twittering of the birds, which were not yet silent. His wife held an umbrella over his head, to screen him from the sun; and in an hour's time the cobbler ordered tea and bread-and-butter, which they all enjoyed greatly upon the fresh sweet grass. Then, while he took his pipe, he made Mrs. Fairly have a walk through the labyrinth with her little ones, undertaking himself the care of George; and as he watched the poor woman walking away with a happy child on each side, and Harry beside her, the poor fellow thought himself well repaid for the scanty meals, hard work, and sundry small self-denials which had enabled him to give so much pleasure.

And so the bright-red sunset came, and the fly-man,

who had been very happy, amusing himself and taking care of his horses, came to say it was time to return home, if they wished not to be out after dark. And George was once more lifted into the fly, and driven through the soft twilight homewards—listening, as if he had never heard them before, to the distant low of the cows, the hum of the beetle, the “churr” of the night-hawk.

The day's pleasure was ended. How long its memory brightened the dull following weeks, and even years, we can scarcely say; but “The day we went out with My Lord” was an epoch by which the family thenceforward marked the dates of events in their simple annals.

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## CHAPTER VII.

THE next four years of the Fairlys' lives offer small matter for their chronicler. They passed in that monotonous struggle for existence which, happily, the force of habit renders bearable; but that scanty and hardly-won livelihood had some few alleviations.

Mr. Vyvyan put the two little girls to school, and found employers for Mrs. Fairly's needle, and a certain small sale for George's toys, when he was able to work. Harry's wages rose, by the dismissal of young Jones, and his strict economy enabled him to help his family greatly. They were very poor, but they loved each other and clung together, and even their poverty had joys the rich and selfish lack. There was the excitement of gaining their daily bread, the enjoyment of every little advantage gained or aid given, and the great pleasure of helping each other. Above all, into the active mind of the disabled carpenter a new element of thought had been infused—a loftier ambition than that of old—which taught and gave a holy patience.

His boy used every leisure moment for study, and his diligence brought forth good fruits. Mr. Vyvyan, touched by their story, gave him an hour's instruction now and then of an evening, and was astonished at the knowledge which

the poor lad had managed to obtain; and his kindness to Harry, and the praises he bestowed upon him, gave him an influence over Fairly which he used for the carpenter's highest benefit.

One day, at the end of those four years, Mr. Vyvyan might have been seen hurrying with an open letter in his hand to Dodd, the stationer's: the good little man was in his shop alone.

"Well, sir," he said, as he returned the clergyman's salutation, "you bring good news—I see by your face!"

"Capital!" said the clergyman: "I have had a letter from Mr. Monckton—here it is; and he says that the school at Fernlea is not connected with Government at all. He and Mr. Ferrars support it between them, and at the death of either an endowment will be left to it; consequently they are not tied in their choice of a schoolmaster, and Harry need not go to the Training College at all. Better still, Mr. Ferrars returned two days ago, and has at once agreed to my request. Harry is schoolmaster of Fernlea whenever you can spare your shopman."

"Well, I thought he would get it, and I am truly glad of it!" said the worthy stationer, his benevolent face gleaming with pleasure. "He is better fit for it than for my place—though a better, an honester, or a kinder lad it would be hard to find. I shall miss him, for he's been like a son to me. I don't think my nephew Tom will be half as much so; but I owe a duty to my family, you see, sir, and it would be wrong to give Harry a share in the business while my sister's son wanted it. What salary will the lad get?"

"Forty pounds and the children's pence. Mr. Ferrars gives twenty pounds and Mr. Monckton twenty pounds; and there is a neat small school-house, and a little garden."

"He'll be able, then, to keep his poor father and the family with him?"

"Yes, and that is one of my greatest reasons for rejoicing at it, as poor Fairly has been a great sufferer lately, and appears to me fast sinking in decline. The fresh country air will be everything for him. Where is Harry?"

"Gone out on a bit of business; he will be in directly. You will have made him very happy, sir."

"Well, I cannot wait. Give him the letter, if you please, and say I wish him joy."

Joy, indeed! The gratitude and happiness of the poor lad were unspeakable.

To go home—to assume the sway of the school where he had been first taught himself—to see all his old friends again, and to see them with the honest pride of deserved success—was a very allowable cause of rejoicing.

Worthy Mr. Dodd put no obstacle in the way; he gave Harry a holiday at once, that he might "go and see about it." And Harry, with a full heart, found himself once more at the hall-door of Fernlea Manor, about to thank the kind Squire for his appointment, and for the remembrance he had preserved of his poor tenants.

He was ushered into the library, where Mr. Ferrars and his daughter Mary sat. They were both in deep mourning, for the object of their care and long exile was now free from pain and weakness for ever. But time had not changed them so much as it had Harry; and they looked with surprise at the tall young man, apparently much older than his years, who stood before them.

"Why, Harry Fairly," said Mr. Ferrars, "how you are grown! I knew you were capable of being our school-master, but I had not realised the fact that you would be such a tall fellow."

Harry felt very shy, but he managed to thank the Squire with tolerable grace for his appointment.

"Ay! Mr. Vyvyan gives you a very high character, Harry—very high! We shall expect great things of you; but you must not make our country lads too learned."

Harry modestly hoped he should deserve Mr. Vyvyan's kindness.

"And your father, Harry—how is he?" asked Miss Ferrars, kindly.

"Thank you, Miss Mary," replied Harry, with a slight quiver of the lip, "he is but poorly still."

"Well, we may hope his native air will set him up again. It is more than six years since his accident, is it not?"

"Seven next Christmas, ma'am."

"Would you like to see the school-house, and arrange for his reception there?" asked the young lady, rising.

Harry thankfully accepted her offer, and they proceeded to the school. It consisted of a wide airy school-room, a parlour, and two small bed-rooms; and the new school-master, with the pleasant sense of property, thought he had never noticed how pretty the building was before, nor how sweet the perfume of the flower-garden.

Being Midsummer, it was holiday-time; and as his predecessor was gone, the house was ready for Harry at once.

"Now, Harry," said Miss Ferrars, as he looked delighted about him, "we will get a room ready for your father at once; and then *he* can be moved here before your furniture is sent from Sunborough. Which room shall it be?"

"He cannot be moved about much, Miss Mary—not up and down stairs every day, I mean. May it be the best room—the parlour?"

"Certainly, if you wish it. Your mother can have a chair-bed in the same room. Then your sisters can occupy one bed-room, and yourself the other."

Harry gratefully acquiesced, and his early benefactress recollected that they could spare a few articles of furniture from the Hall, to begin his establishment.

Before he left the village by the evening train, Harry visited all his old acquaintances—first of all Miller, whom he found singing cheerfully at his last. The cobbler's delight was excessive.

"Ah, lad!" he said, "it were *I* who gave thee a hint to be doing!"

"So you did, Master Miller; and a true and kind friend you've always been to me and mine."

"I hope to make shoes for you all again!" said My Lord, jovially. "And when will your father come?"

"As soon as may be," replied Harry, "for he is very ill, Master Miller."

"The old place will give him a new lease of his life. Happiness and health go a deal together, Harry."

"I hope so," said the son, earnestly. "Will you walk to the forge with me, Master Miller?"

"To be sure, lad!" laying down his last: "Master Knight will be right glad to see you; you'll find your old playmate, Jessie, much changed—she's grown a fine lassie now."

And they proceeded to the forge.

The blacksmith was rejoiced to see Harry. He insisted on their both coming in, and tasting his wife's gooseberry wine; and a fresh welcome awaited the young schoolmaster from Mrs. Knight and her daughter, who was grown a tall, handsome girl, but kept the happy smile which Harry remembered in his old playfellow.

Thus the Fernlea welcome was a promise of the brightening future, and the young man returned to Sunborough with a rejoicing heart.

Before the June roses had all faded, the Fairly family were installed in their new home. From the low, long window of the parlour George Fairly could gaze upon the rich colours of the flowers and the fresh verdure of the trees, from behind which rose the grey old church-tower. Through the open lattice came the soft, sweet summer air, cooling and soothing his burning brow; while his wife now sang at her work, and his young daughters ran wildly about in the meadows, and gathered buttercups and daisies.

The blessed country! They had never known its charms before they had been deprived of them.

Autumn came, in its rich brown splendour, and found the village-school flourishing and the young schoolmaster well established in his post; but a sorrow greater than all he had ever known came in with the falling leaves—George Fairly was slowly passing away from earth! He had much improved in health during the first few weeks of his return, but the change was not lasting, and day by day, of late, his strength had grown less.

But his decline was cheered by many solaces for which he had never hoped again. There was the success of his son, and the cheerful companionship of his old friend, Miller, who seldom let an evening pass without dropping in to have a chat with him, or to listen to Harry's reading. Mr. Vyvyan, too, came very often; he had grown intimate at the Hall, and never visited the Ferrars without calling on

the carpenter. He had added a few books to Harry's tiny library: one was "The Christian Year," and this was George Fairly's especial favourite. That delicious music of the Church was to him the pleasantest teaching, and he was never weary of listening to it. Miller shared in this admiration, though neither, perhaps, understood the full meaning of those wonderful poems. The taste for poetry is far stronger amongst the peasantry than in any other class; and it is remarkable that their native intelligence generally prefers that which is best; though, not being fastidious, they will accept the hymns of the Meeting House occasionally, rather than lack it altogether.

Of "The Christian Year," George Fairly preferred the hymns for the Second Sunday after Christmas and the Sixteenth Sunday after Trinity. They "fitted his circumstances best," he was wont to say.

One evening Harry had been reading the latter to him, and was called away suddenly by some business. Miller, who was smoking beside the couch, took the book, and, looking earnestly at it, said,—

"It's uncommon pretty; but, George, you are the last man I should have thought who would have cared for such-like."

"Once upon a time I shouldn't," replied the carpenter; "I hadn't time for such toys, as I should have called 'em. I was like the good woman in the Holy Bible, 'careful and troubled about many things.' I don't know as I should have ever given myself time to think, if I hadn't been forced to it, I was so full of my work and of the boy, and a-wishing him to get on in the world. I was always hearing how men may get on in our country: folks would say, 'There's So-and-so—he's a great man now; his son's in the Parliament House;' or, 'There's such another—he's rolling in riches, and he began with not a shilling, or only a shilling, in his pocket;' and I thought, why couldn't I do the like?"

He paused, and gazed thoughtfully out on the red sunset.

"But you didn't count the cost," said the cobbler, inflexible in his opinions; "I al'ays said that it don't do for us to be al'ays a-tryin' to pull ourselves up'ards."

"Except," said the carpenter, with a very sweet smile—

"except to the greatest height of all—'the crown of our high calling.' But, Miller, I can't and don't regret that I've done my utmost to help poor Harry to be more than a workman."

"No, to be sure not, George, my man! You've been the best of fathers—everybody *do* say that!"

"You see there is no sin in striving upwards," continued George, "if only we do not risk our better prospects for the mere earthly ones—and Harry was such a clever lad! I declare to you, Miller, I used to forget I was hungry, often, when I looked at him over his books: and see the comforts he has brought me!"

And the carpenter looked with a sigh of pleasure round the pretty apartment.

"I wish you could have been spared a few years yet, George," said the cobbler, "to see what he will come to! It's my opinion that Harry will be a great man yet!"

At this moment the subject of their conversation entered, and, startled by an unusually weary look in his father's face, drew Miller skilfully away.

"You are tired, my dear father!" he said, as, when the cobbler was gone, he took his seat by the couch; "Miller has been talking too much, I am afraid."

"No, lad; and all he says is pleasant: he thinks you'll be a great man by and by, Harry."

The young man smiled.

"Do you wish that I should, father?"

"Not as I once did, my dear boy! I hope you'll do your duty, and use your gifts. But, Harry, there's a better 'UPWARDS.' Lift me up, that I may look at the sunset once more!"

Harry raised him in his arms, and he gazed wistfully at the red line of light in the horizon, and the faint rosy tint still lingering on the church-tower.

"The old bell-tower!" he said, dreamily. "It was all right—all in mercy, Harry! I know it now. God bless you, dear lad! I am sleepy—send your mother to me!"

Harry tenderly replaced him on his pillow. The father smiled on him fondly, whispered "Upwards!" and closed his eyes.



"Mother," said Harry, as at that moment she entered the room, "father's very tired to-night! He's almost asleep now."

Her experienced eye rested on the pale face and closed eyes, and she hurried forward.

Her fear had hit the truth. George Fairly would never feel weary more!

\* \* \* \* \*

A few words, and our tale is done.

Not in vain had the good father striven and endured. Not in vain had his heart been bent and broken by the blows of God's Hammer of Trial and Suffering. The reward came, though his mortal eyes did not behold it. Harry—a close and diligent student, as well as a faithful and active master—reaped golden profit from hard hours of toil and study.

Years after poor Fairly had been gathered to his rest, Mr. Vyvyan (now the husband of Mary Ferrars) succeeded in getting for her early *protégé* the Mastership of the old Sunborough Grammar-School; for Harry was already known as a writer and a ripe scholar, and a man otherwise of high character.

There was a good house and large salary attached to the situation; and Harry, with honest pride, installed his poor mother, after all her trials, in a home which her wildest dreams had never imaged to her. His sisters were long ago respectably married.

The Fairly family had an upward tendency, as the children of good and prudent parents often have. Harry had room for more than his mother in his spacious dwelling: so he furnished two pretty rooms, and in them he installed the friend of old and evil times, now grown too old to work. And who may describe the pride and delight of Miller, when he smoked his pipe in his cosy parlour, and discoursed to Harry's mother of her boy's success?

"There's only one drawback, ma'am," he would say—"only one—but there always is a summat, I've marked, in this life—if poor George could but have seen it! But we must submit to the drawback, and be thankful. Perhaps, if

the lad had had his father, he might have been too happy, especially when he brings home his young wife, Miss Katie Dodd; and then he might have forgot the need of striving upwards beyond this world. So, no doubt, it's for the best!"

"No doubt, indeed, Master Miller," would the widow reply, meekly. "It is not for them to murmur, who owe so many thanks for bounties, spiritual and temporal, as the Fairly family do!"

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